BLAU INTERNATIONAL
Art Magazine

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No. 13

BLAU INTERNATIONAL

Winter 2025/2026

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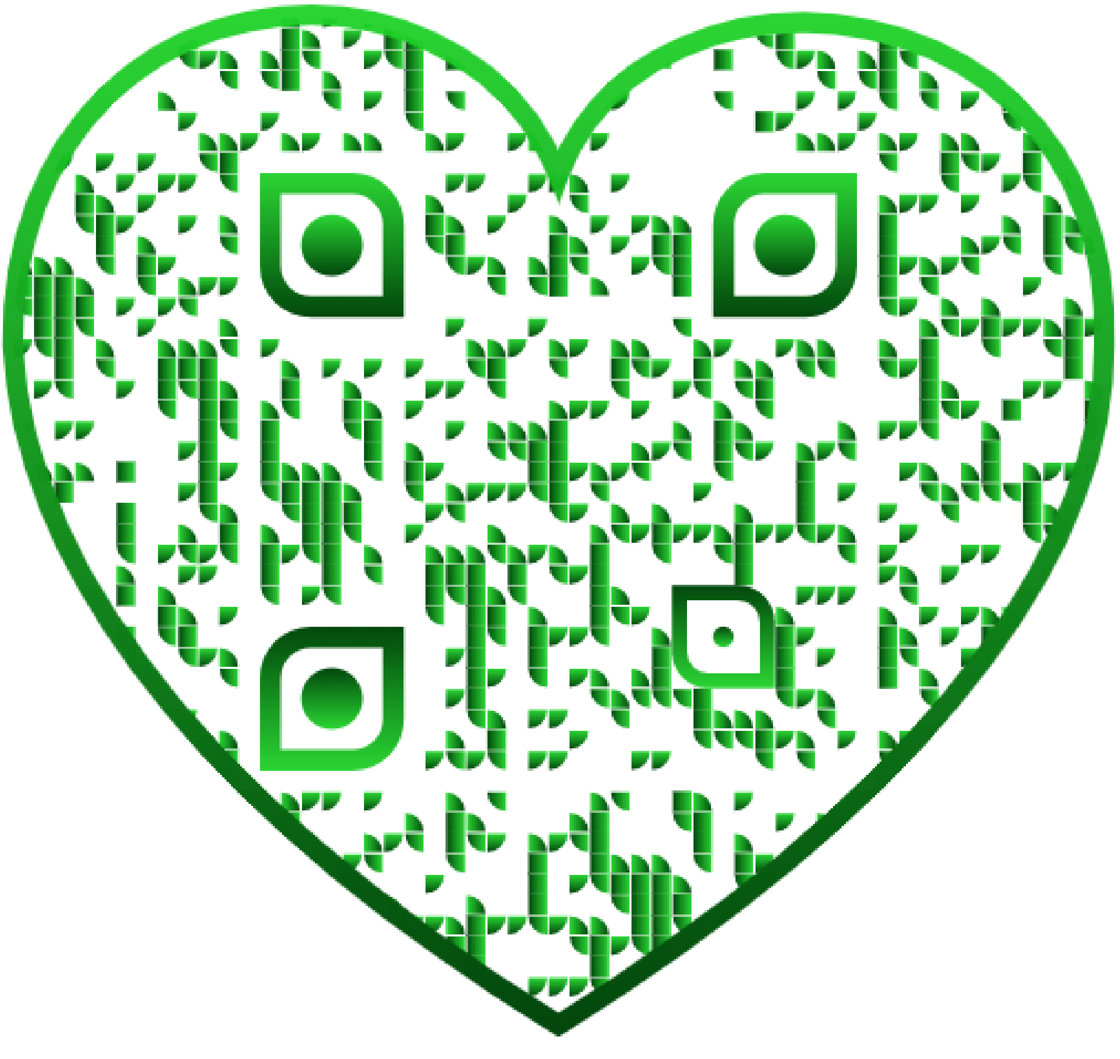
“I have constantly been looking for a distant land” – Cai Guo-Qiang

VICTOR MAN
A journey to the end
of the night

Inside the battery
CHARLINE VON HEYL
on paintings with direct force

ANDREW WYETH
Shaping the main game
of life, inch by inch

OTTO MEYER-AMDEN
Up in the mountains,
making his myth



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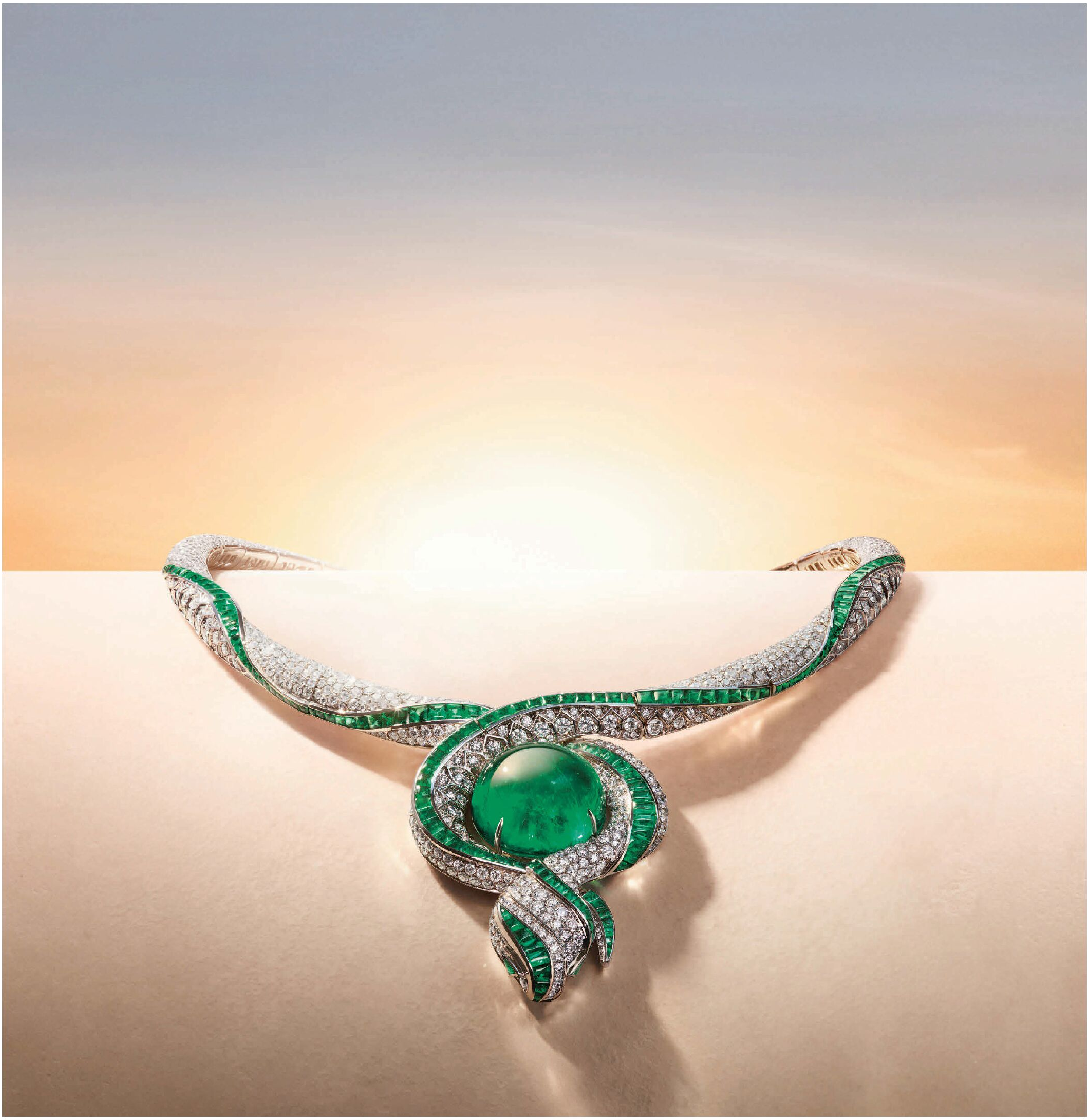

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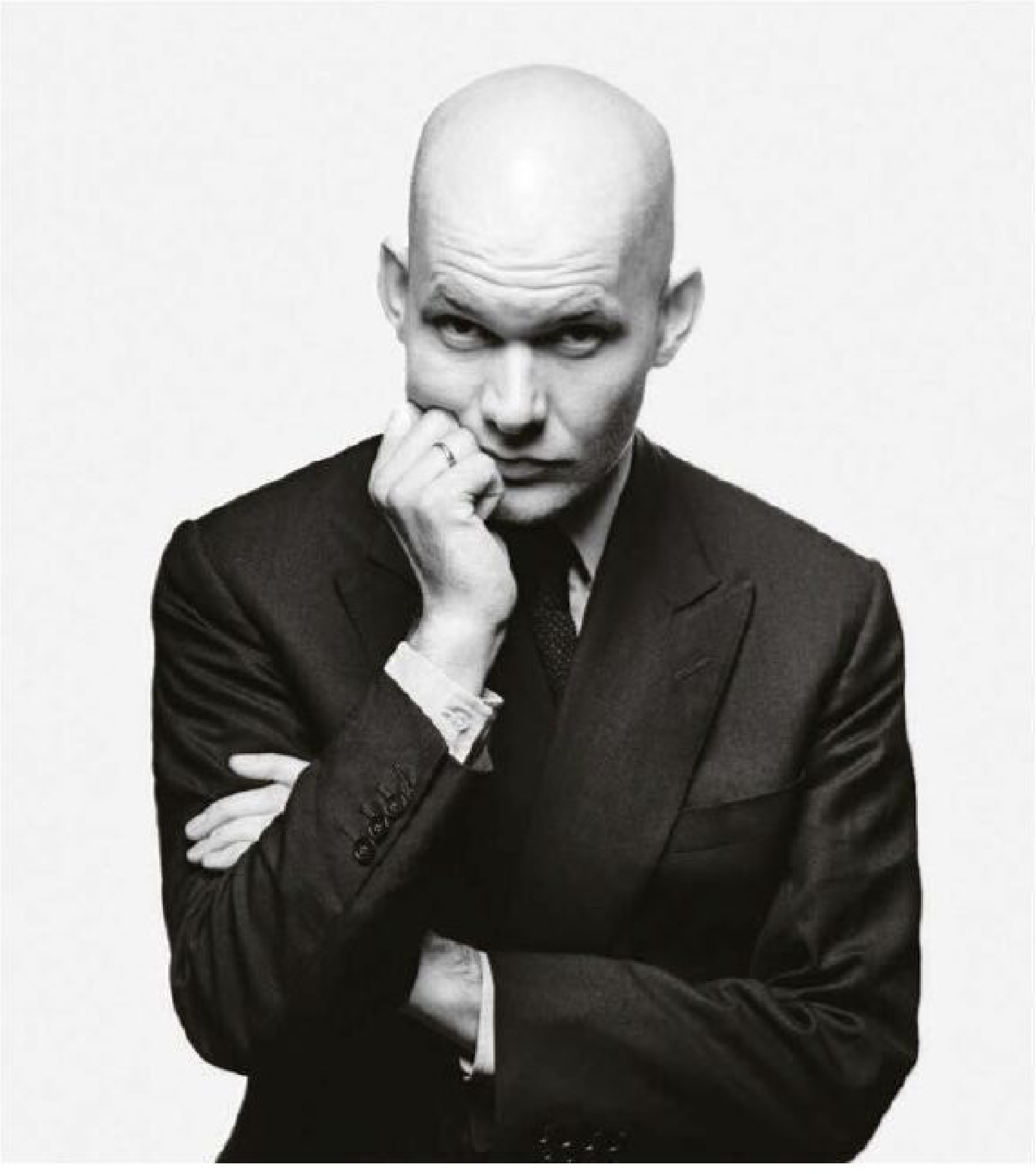
Publicis Et Nous

HERMÈS
PARIS
Hermès, drawing on your mind

Editor's Note



CORNELIUS TITTEL

One of the biggest pleasures of editing this magazine is discovering a new artist who is just brilliant enough to make it onto our pages. Compared to other art publications focusing on the very now, the stakes are decidedly higher. At BLAU, an emerging artist—like the young sculptor Grant Falardeau, who you will learn about in this issue—is up against the great, and sometimes forgotten, of a sprawling timeline. And even though competition is fierce, there always seems to be someone equally fresh and fantastic that we can't help but share with you.

Rarer still is the discovery of a new author. Writing about art is a somewhat dying craft, with the mainstream print media in general decline—which often hits cultural commentary first—and niche publications so esoteric and underfunded that an aspiring author won't stick around long enough to even find their own voice.

That's why I was thrilled when David Salle suggested I should look into Andrew Winer—not that there was much art writing to be found by him. Andrew, as David told me, had written the novels *The Marriage Artist* and *The Color Midnight Made*, had received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Fiction, and was a professor of creative writing at the University of California. But better still: Andrew had once wanted to become a visual artist himself, studying at UCLA in Los Angeles. And according to David, Andrew was the kind of person who *really* understood what being an artist meant and was therefore *exactly* the person an artist would want to talk to. If we got him going, we would have the author of our dreams. Needless to say: David was right.

Since Andrew Winer's cover story on Philip Taaffe, there hasn't been a single issue of BLAU without him contributing an outstanding text. There was Vija Celmins, who he visited for us, Eric Fischl, too, and not least the Roman emperor Hadrian—although the conversation with the latter happened to be more of a telepathic one.

Now we've stepped up our growing Winer-obsession. Not only did we ask him to write two pieces for the very magazine you are holding in your hands; we also flew him from Los Angeles to Berlin to meet one of the greatest living artists of our time for the upcoming spring issue's cover story. Unsustainable, you might say? I defy anyone who reads Winer's introduction to the idiosyncratic world of Grant Falardeau (page 60), or his personal essay on the American master Andrew Wyeth (page 70), to still think about carbon emissions. His words are in the wind.

Sincerely yours,
Cornelius Tittel

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REVUE

ANDREW WYETH

Both the most famous and most unknown of great American artists, Wyeth is saluted by Andrew Winer

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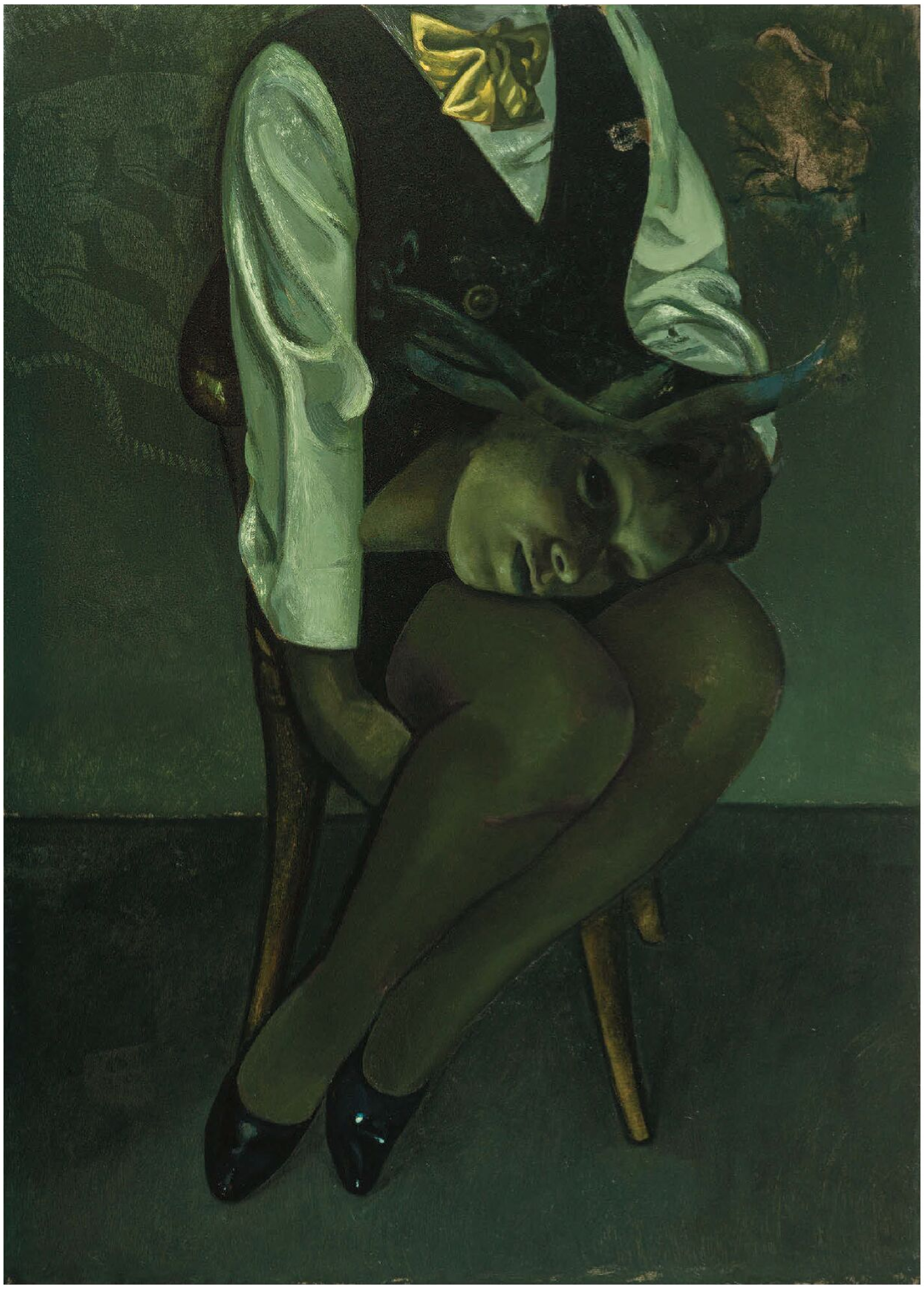

VICTOR MAN, *The Chandler*, 2013, oil on cardboard, 101 × 72 cm
Cover 1: VICTOR MAN, *Melancholia or The Peripatetic Girl*, 2022–23, oil on canvas, 65 × 54 cm
Cover 2: CAI GUO-QIANG, *Study for the Cosmos No. 4*, 2022, gunpowder on glass and mirror, 186 × 156 cm

> “TURNING AWAY FROM THE WORLD SEEMS TO BE AN ALMOST PHYSICAL NECESSITY FOR HIM”
>
> — Cornelius Tittel on Victor Man

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On The Wrist

CAI GUO-QIANG
Close to the explosion, Frank Rose meets the artist who, for once, goes all in on painting
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CHARLINE VON HEYL
Keeping it eclectic, she discusses her process, influences, and beneficial blind spots with Max Dax
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VICTOR MAN
Quiet days in Cluj: Cornelius Tittel visits the Man himself
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SEVERAL VESSELS
Udo Kittelmann shares his passion for and collection of Margarete Heymann-Loebenstein
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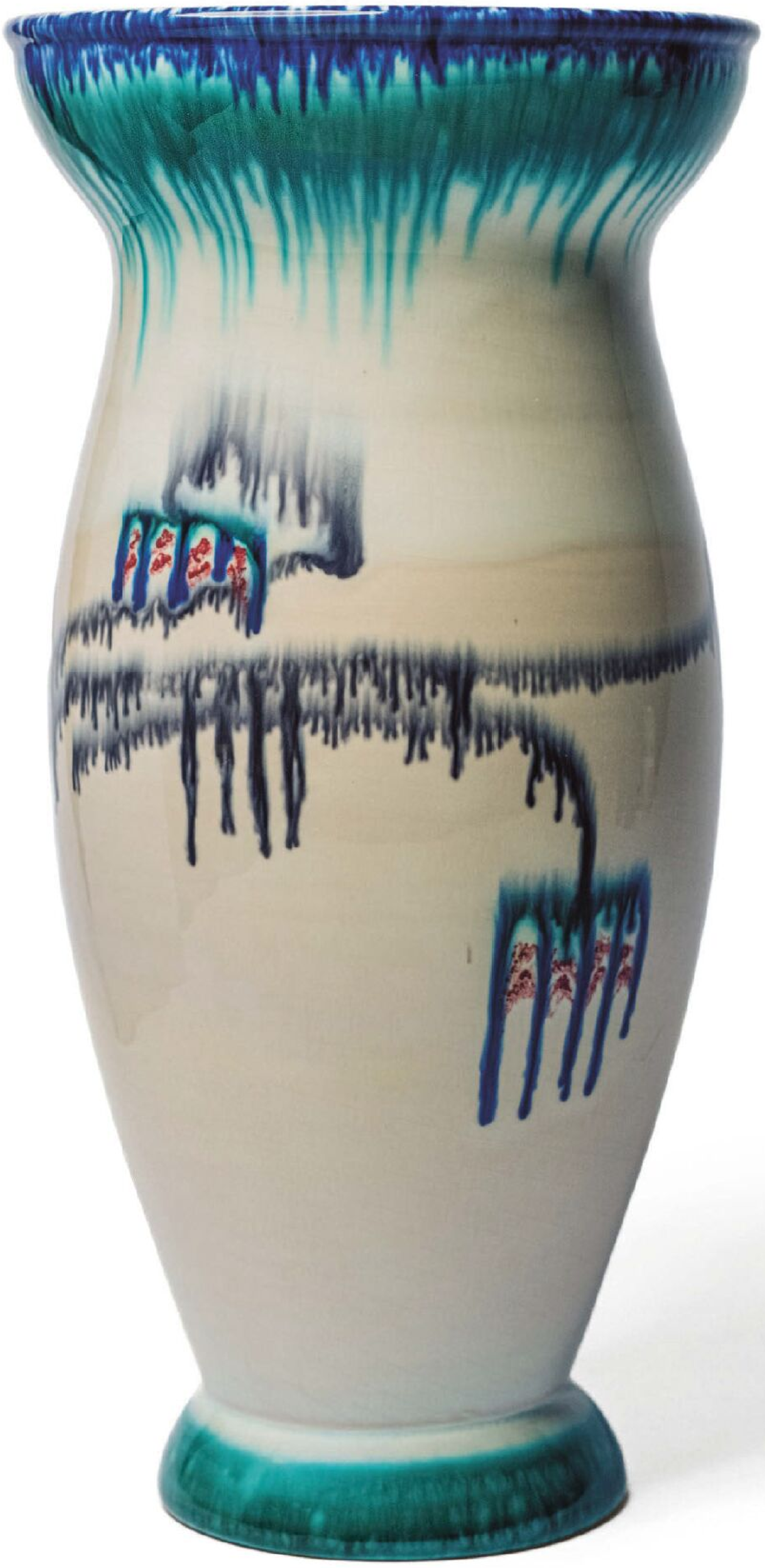
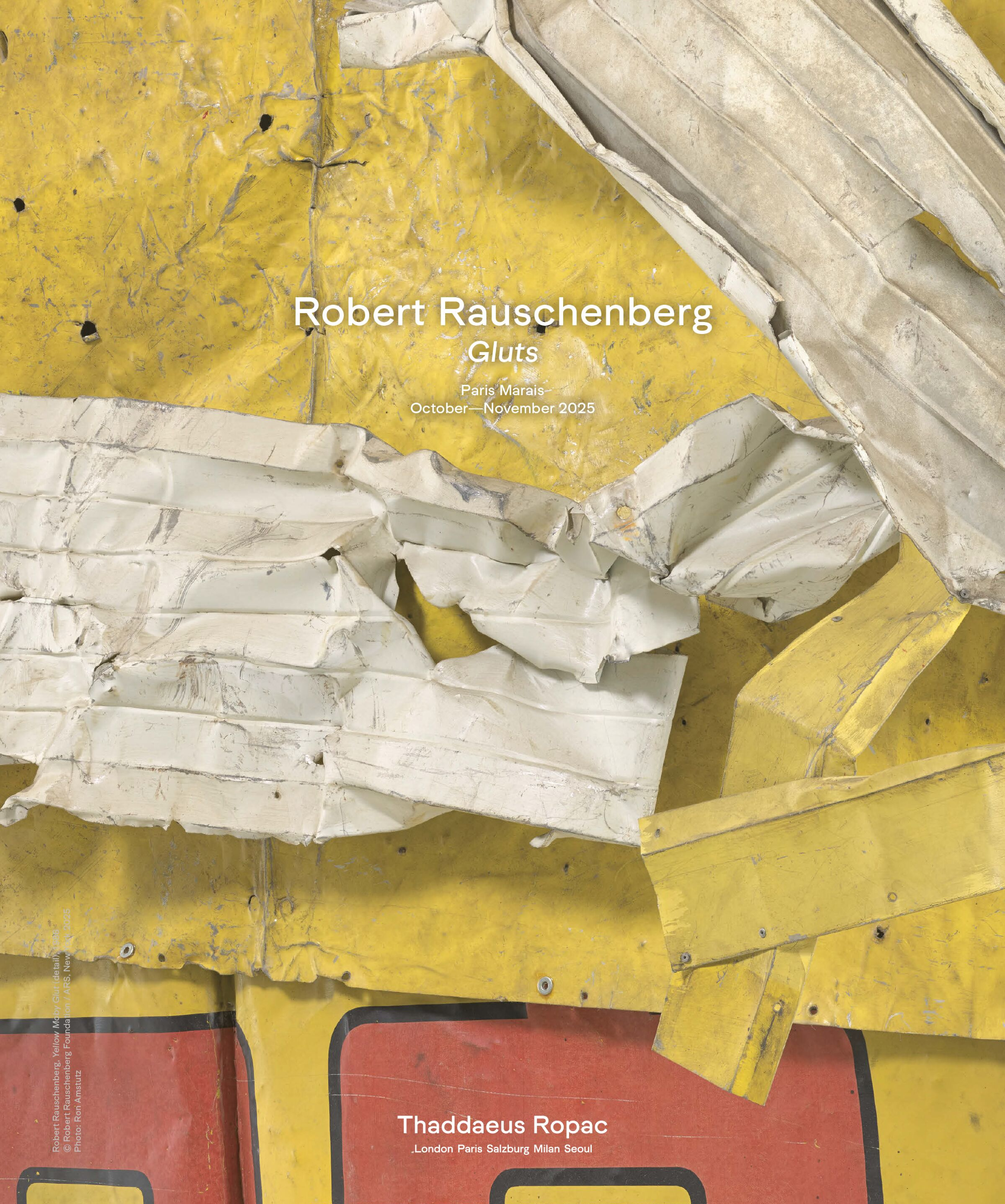


MARGARETE HEYMANN-LOEBENSTEIN, *Vase*, c. 1925–30, stoneware, paint, glaze, 28 cm high

> “AN ECHO OF BAUHAUS EXPERIMENTATION TRANSPOSED ONTO DOMESTIC OBJECTS”
>
> — Udo Kittelmann on Margarete Heymann-Loebenstein



Robert Rauschenberg

Gluts

Paris Marais
October—November 2025

Robert Rauschenberg, *Yellow Moby Glut* (detail), 1986
© Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / ARS, New York 2025
Photo: Ron Amstutz

Thaddaeus Ropac
London Paris Salzburg Milan Seoul

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The inventor of scrap yard constructivism talks heavy metal with the editor
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Having built cathedrals of light and color, the Czech painter deserves this vigil by Hans-Joachim Müller
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Marie Chaix and Julie Greve usher in an age of innocence
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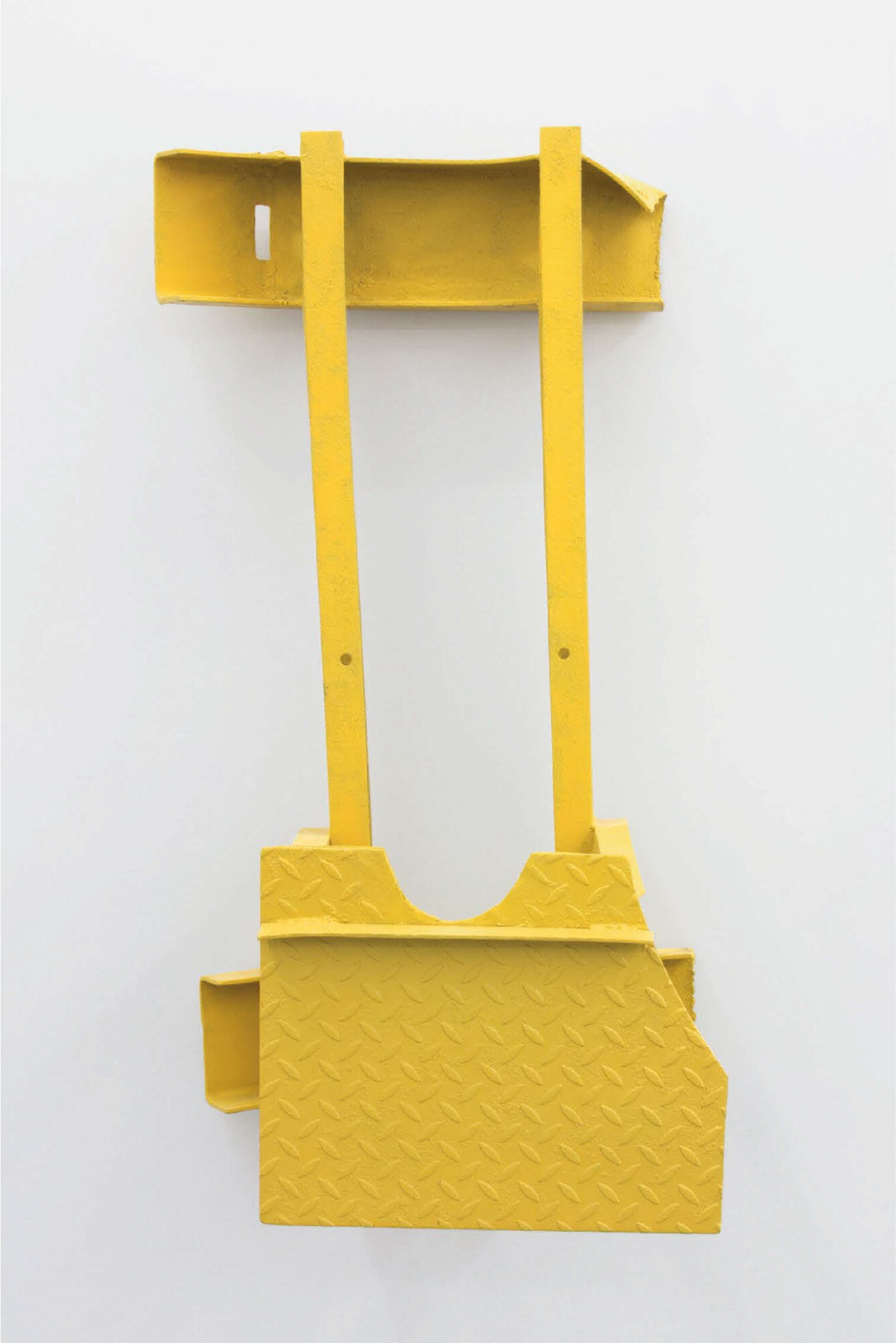

MEUSER, *Tiefstapler*, 2018, oil on steel, 114 × 62 × 55 cm

> "SCRAP METAL, THERE'S SO MUCH OF IT. AND A LOT OF IT IS GARBAGE TOO"
>
> — Meuser

ALBERT OEHLEN

Endless Summer

Gagosian
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October 20–December 20, 2025

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No. 13, Winter 2025/2026

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In the Studio

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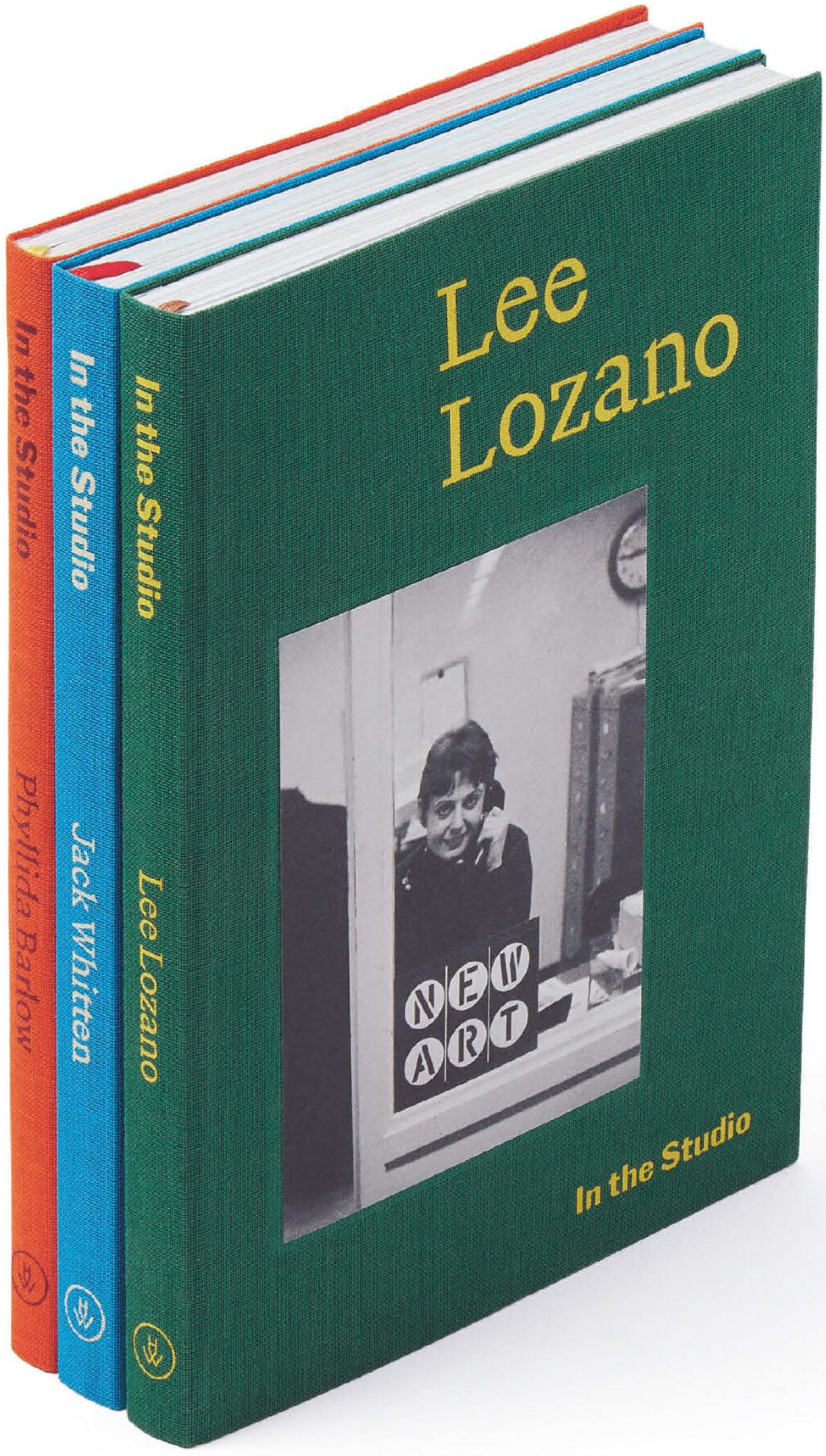
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In the Studio

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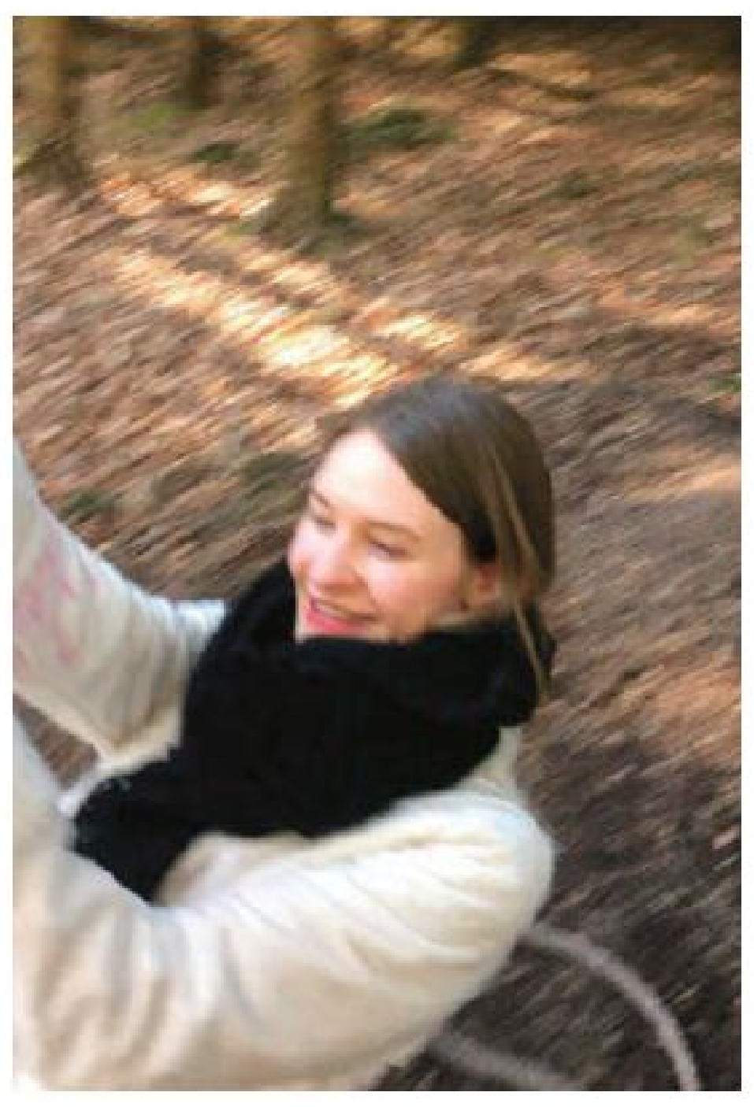


JULIE GREVE

From her early work, while still at Central Saint Martin's, for J.W. Anderson, to this issue's fashion story (p. 180)—with a show at Amsterdam's Huis Marseille, recent campaigns for Valentino, and editorials for *AnOther Magazine* in between—Danish photographer Julie Greve has always put girlhood first. As she said in an interview, "The girls are in their own world," and it is one that is as sweetly intimate as it is hypnotically captivating. Alices with no need of Wonderland.

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

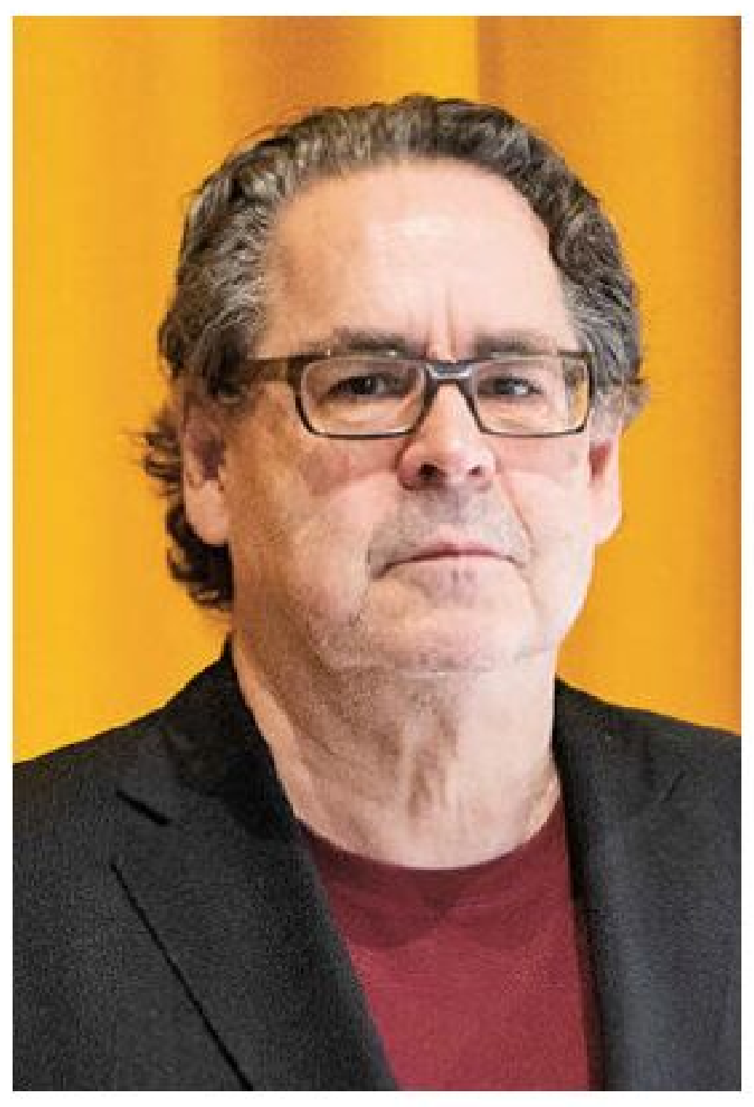
On one hand, Slavoj Žižek is about as popular as a philosopher can get—a well-respected professor teaching at Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities, the European Graduate School, New York University, and the University of Ljubljana. On the other, he's a man never shy of controversy. With his incisive writing about anything from Trump to Hitchcock, he has earned his place in the pantheon of theorists. In this issue, he takes us back to the opera that changed his life (p. 58).

LEILA HEKMAT

Born in 1981, erstwhile Angeleno Leila Hekmat has long made her home in Berlin, where in 2023 she had her first major museum show at the Haus am Waldsee, *Female Remedy*, and last winter staged her tragicomic opera *Gloriette*. In spring 2026, her *Roses Rising 1 & 2* will be at Berlin's Gropius Bau and HAU Hebbel am Ufer. An artist equally comfortable with theatre, visual arts, and film, in this issue Hekmat writes about fellow multi-hyphenate Peter Greenaway (p. 36).

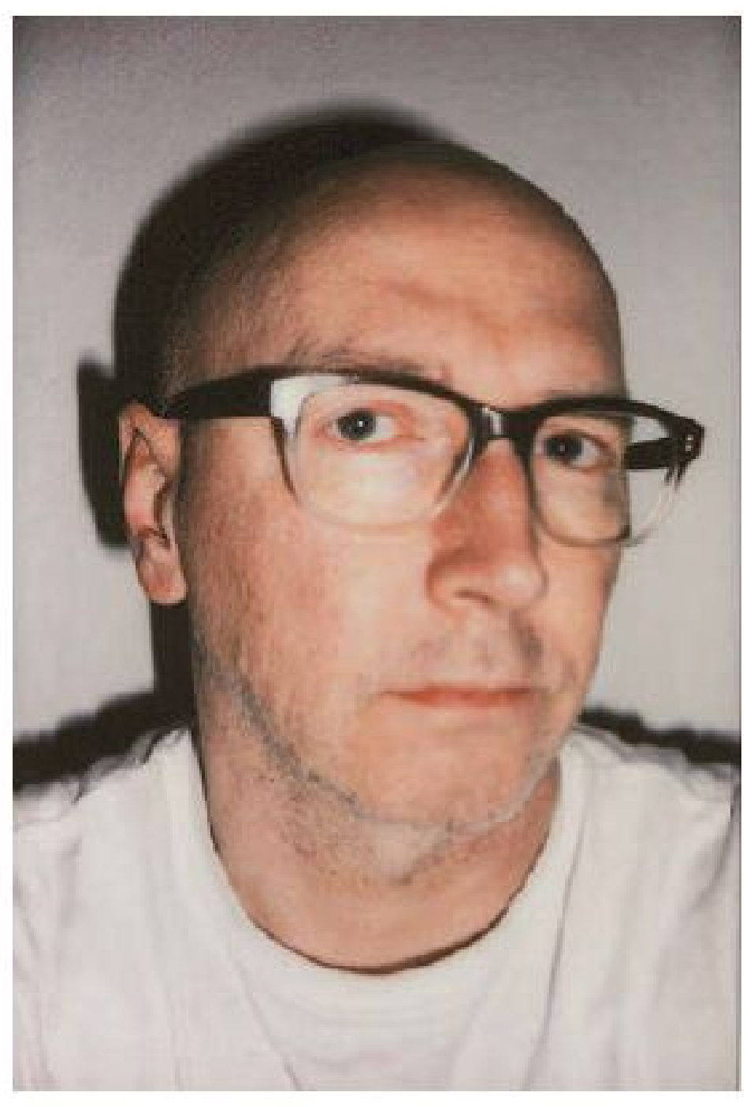
ANDREW WINER

With *two* essays in this issue, one on the perhaps most American painter, Andrew Wyeth (p. 70), and one on the young sculptor Grant Falardeau (p. 60), Andrew Winer straddles two very different eras. This seems to be his preferred position, however, as he's not only finishing his third novel (after *The Marriage Artist* and *The Color Midnight Made*), but also co-authoring a book for Oxford University Press on the contemporary relevance of Nietzsche's ideas about the affirmation of life!



UDO KITTELMANN

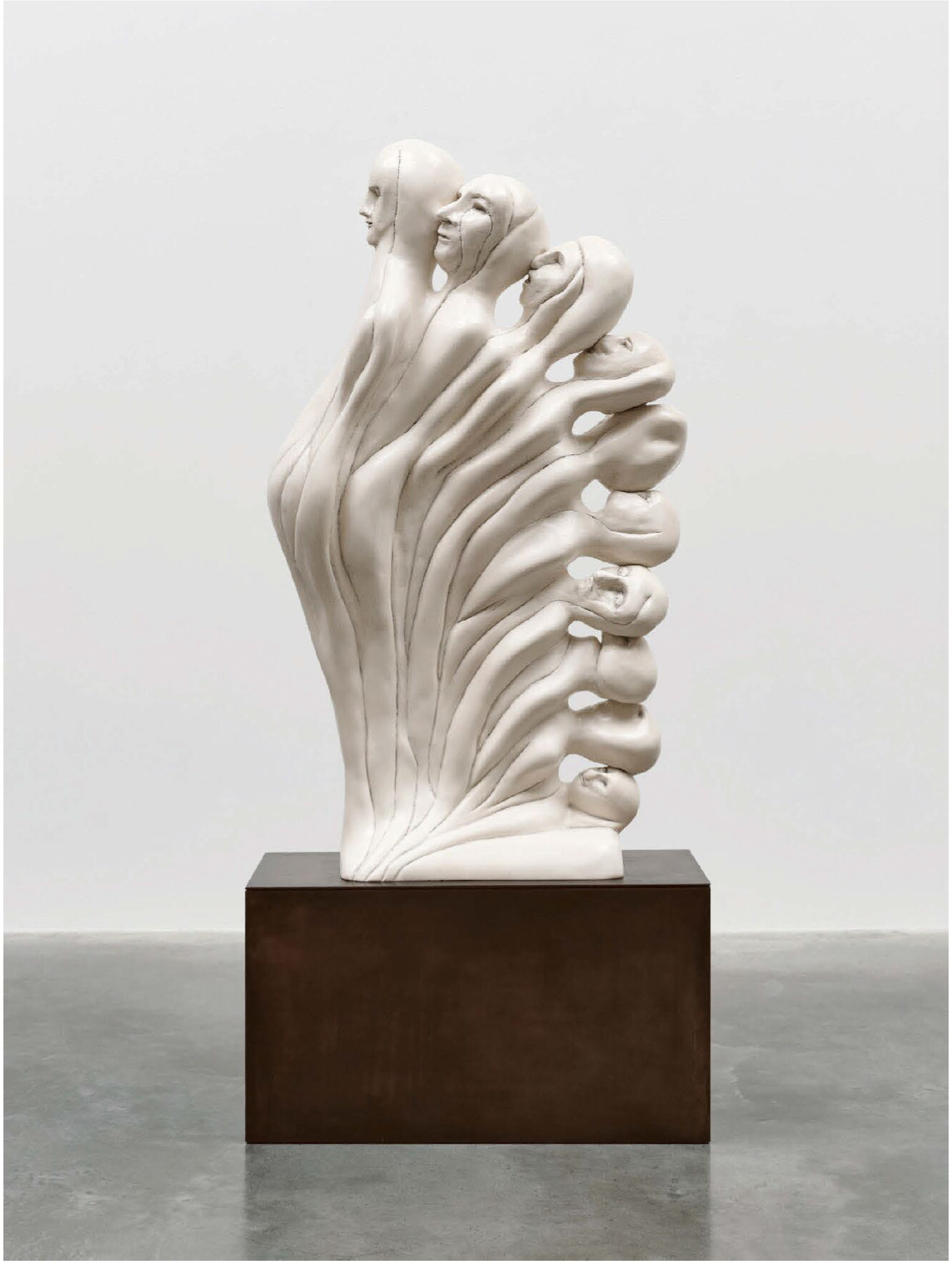
As the director of Berlin's Neue Nationalgalerie, Udo Kittelmann proved to have a knack for the unexpected. And the same must be said of Kittelmann, the collector. A man of many obsessions, he's an afficionado of anything from Brazilian folk art to first editions of German expressionist literature. But nothing makes his heart race like discovering a great ceramic artist. From page 130, he shares his love for (and collection of) Margarete Heymann-Loebenstein.



THOMAS HAUSER

Originally a painter, Thomas Hauser has focused on photography for the past 10 years. "I realized that the images I made with a camera are far away from what I had in mind to be art," he recently said. But then, "The photos spoke to me: We are yours!" Most recently, his wonderfully singular images have appeared in publications such as *Numéro*, *Crash*, *Fluid*, and *Vogue Germany*. For this issue, he photographed the great German painter Markus Lüpertz (p. 196).

WHITE CUBE



Enrico David, *Assumption of we*, 2014–25 © Enrico David. Photo © White Cube (Theo Christelis)

ENRICO DAVID

The Soul Drains the Hand

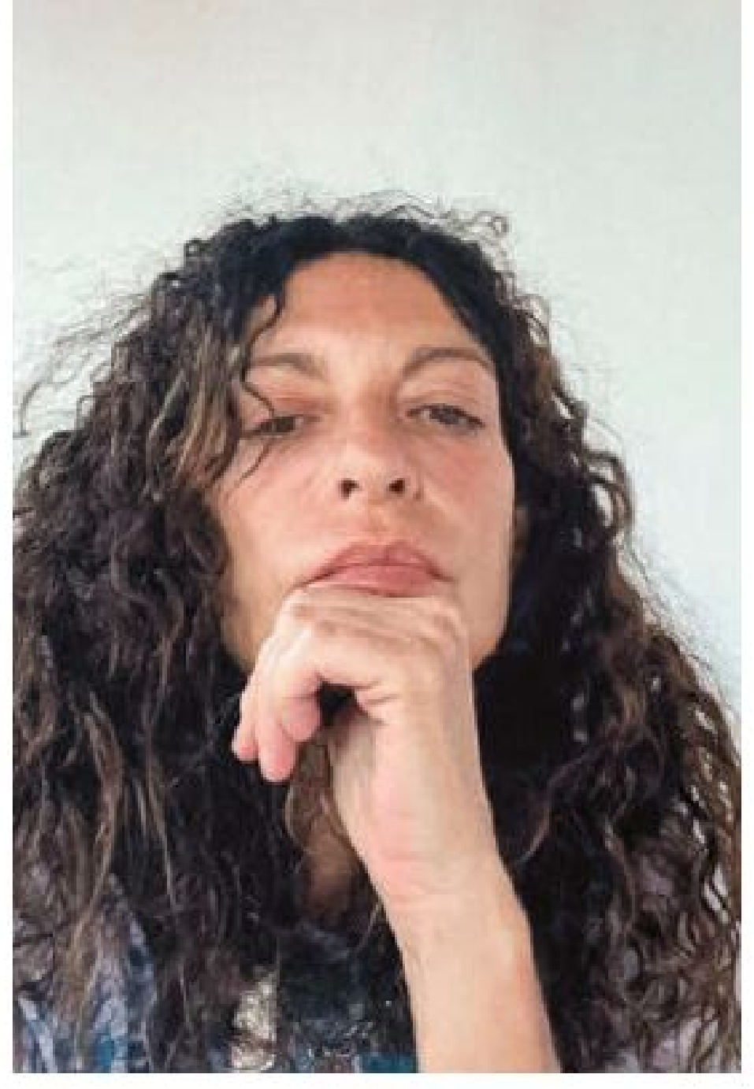
21 October – 19 December 2025

White Cube, 10 avenue Matignon, 75008 Paris

Contributors

With her preference for lo-fi video-cam imagery, LA-based photographer Moni Haworth has developed a visual language that is perfectly suited to capturing the world's weird (and occasionally wonderful) underbelly. From her recent 320-page photo-manga fantasy epic with Lotta Volkova and Raiki Yamamoto to *Gummo*-goth portraits of Ethel Cain and Jenna Ortega, Haworth hews close to the uncanny. Much like the young sculptor Grant Falardeau, who she captures or BLAU (p. 60).

MONI HAWORTH



Having taken over the studio of his sculptor grandfather, the young painter Bendt Eyckermans has developed a pictorial language that communicates with all that was left behind. As his personal essay (p. 154) explains and the gorgeous photographs by François Halard reveal, the space offers him many generations of fragments that have come to influence his lightly surrealist (he is Belgian after all!) tableaux, paintings that "grow beyond the limits of the canvas."

BENDT EYCKERMANS

In published form, the 300 letters Bauhaus legend Oskar Schlemmer and the lesser-known Otto Meyer-Amden exchanged over 24 years make up 1,824 illustrated pages. As one of the editors of *Das Seelenpostbuch*, Elisa Tamaschke ranks as a pre-eminent scholar of Meyer-Amden. In this issue (p. 38) she tells the story of an artist who found his voice in alpine seclusion. She is now curator at the Georg Kolbe Museum and head of exhibitions, research, and publications.

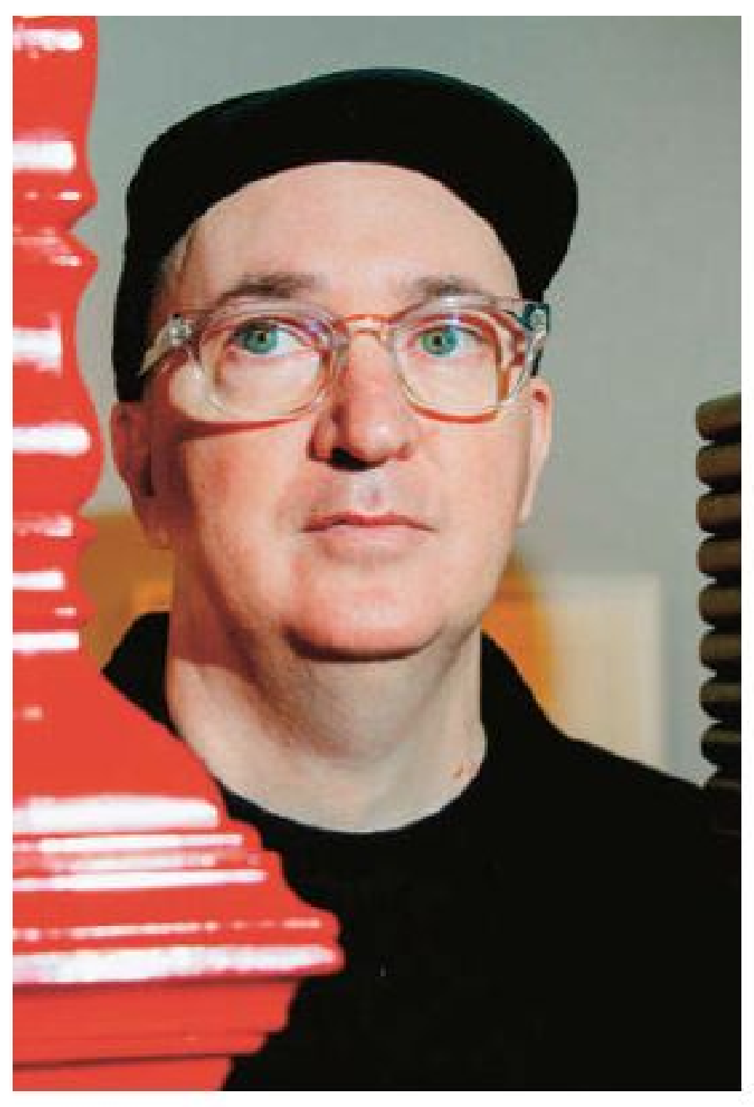
ELISA TAMASCHKE

Aside from shooting luminaries like WJuliette Binoche, Rem Koolhaas, or artist Michaël Borremans, Belgian photographer Charlie De Keersmaecker has a long-running project called *At Home*, for which he takes portraits of Antwerp locals in his own home. In an interview last year, he explained that, post-Covid, this was a way of recapturing his love of the medium. For this issue, he photographed painter Charline von Heyl not at home but on the run (p. 100).

CHARLIE DE KEERSMAECKER

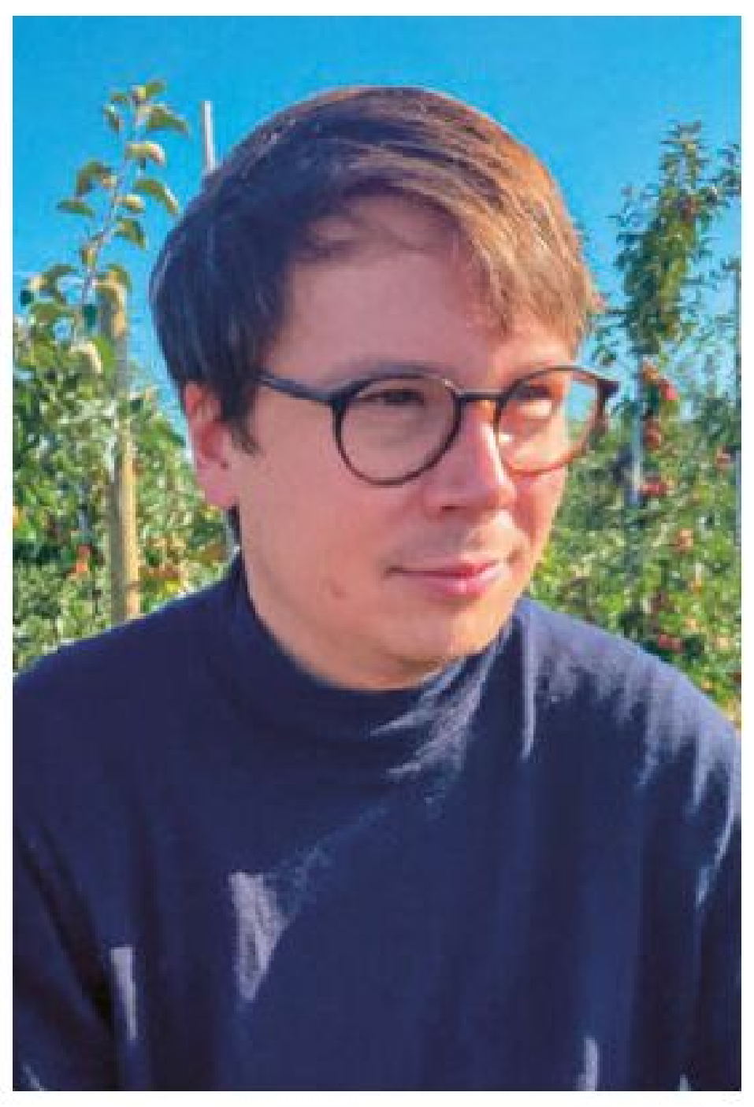
It has been exactly six years since Brian Donnelly featured in the debut issue of BLAU International—with the first major interview on his collecting. It's a passion that has only grown in intensity, to a point that, in 2024, New York's Drawing Center invited him to stage *The Way I See It: Selections from the KAWS Collection*, featuring a multitude of outsider artists. Of these, for us, KAWS compiled a list of his 10 favorites (p. 208). Trust us: you will not regret looking them all up.

KAWS



A curator and writer based in Berlin, Nils Emmerichs has just published his PhD thesis as a book: *Heiner Müllers Bildmaschine*, a fascinating analysis of how the playwright used contemporary art as an accelerator for his work. With another book on art dealer Michael Werner in the making, it made sense that Emmerichs (along with BLAU editor Cornelius Tittel) would sit down with one of Werner's star painters, Markus Lüpertz, to discuss the perfect academy (p. 196).

NILS EMMERICHS



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Installation view: Richard Prince, *Posters*, Hetzler | Marfa, 2025 © Richard Prince. Photo: Alex Marks

Richard Prince
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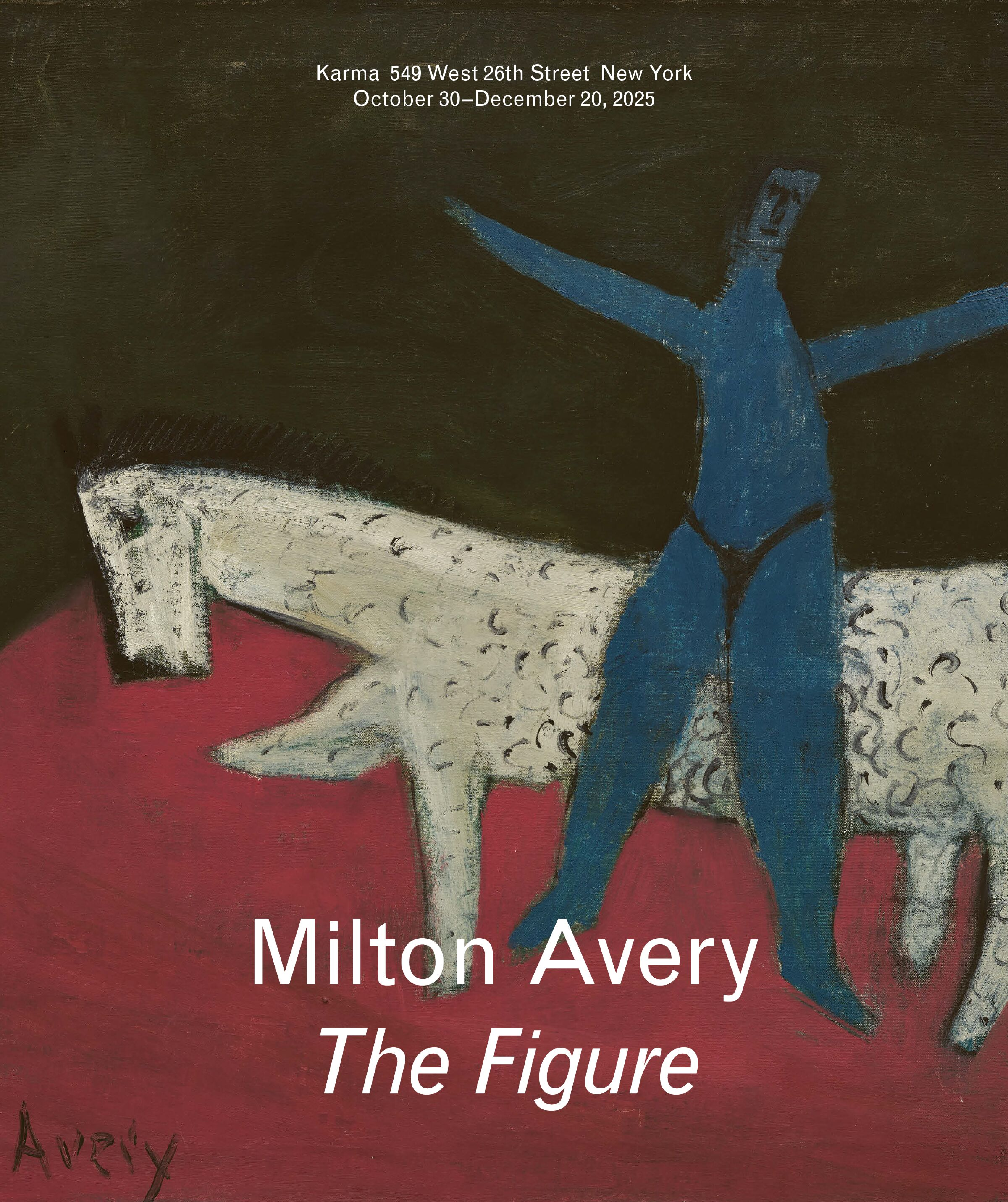


Karma 549 West 26th Street New York
October 30–December 20, 2025

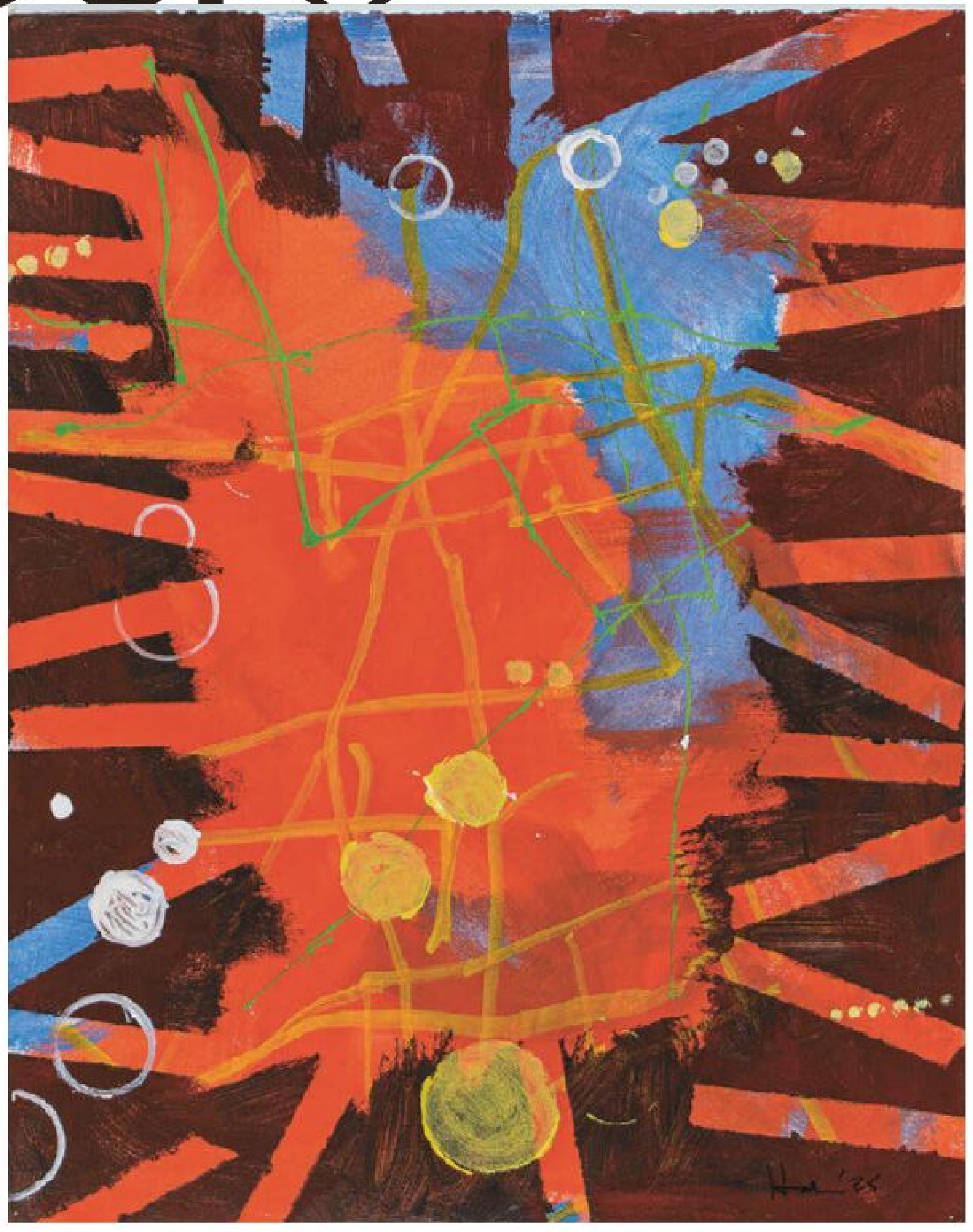
Milton Avery
The Figure

APÉRO

INTERNATIONAL

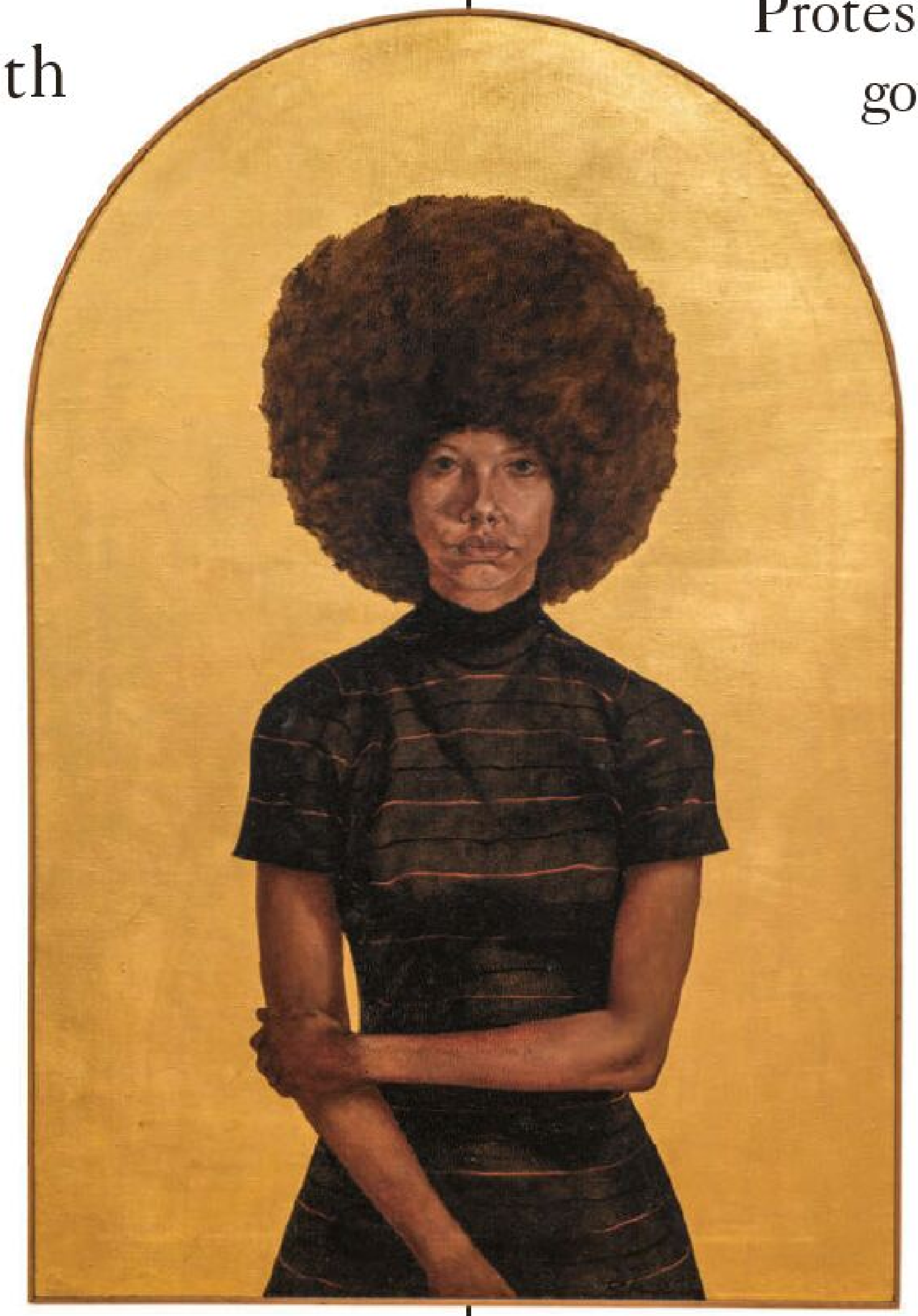
“It’s a good thing to do as an artist—corner yourself”
— Grant Falardeau, see page 60

Apéro

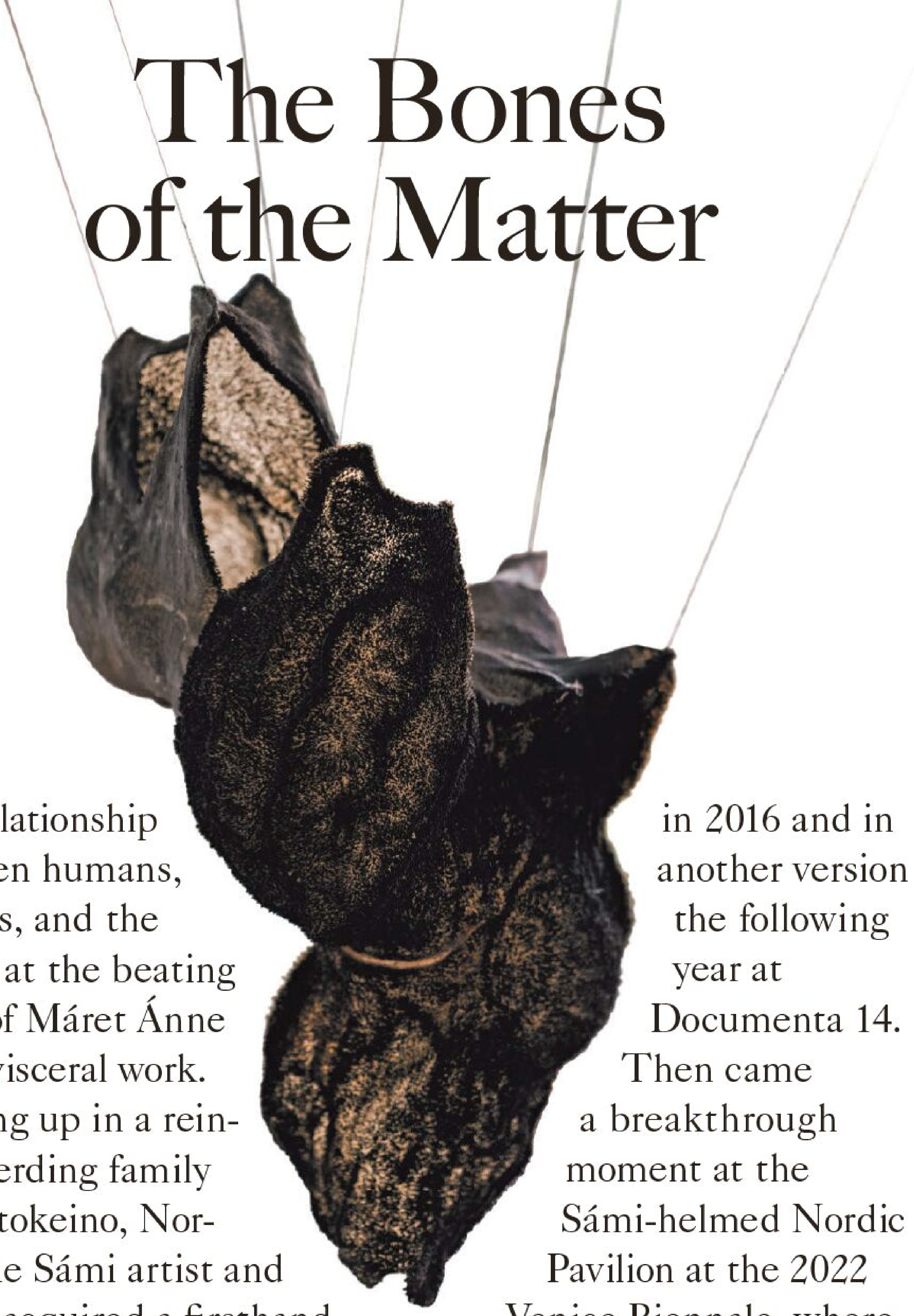

CYNTHIA HAWKINS, *Untitled*, 2025

Seven years after its closure in 2018, Harlem's brand-new, purpose-built Studio Museum reopens this November—all seven floors, 82,000 square feet dedicated to Black art and artists. The first iteration, which opened in 1968 in a rented loft above a neighborhood liquor store, focused on making space for local artists of African descent. The museum soon established itself as the nexus of Black creativity in New York City, its artist-in-residence program going on to help launch the careers of Kerry James Marshall, David Hammons, Mickalene Thomas, and Njideka Akunyili Crosby.

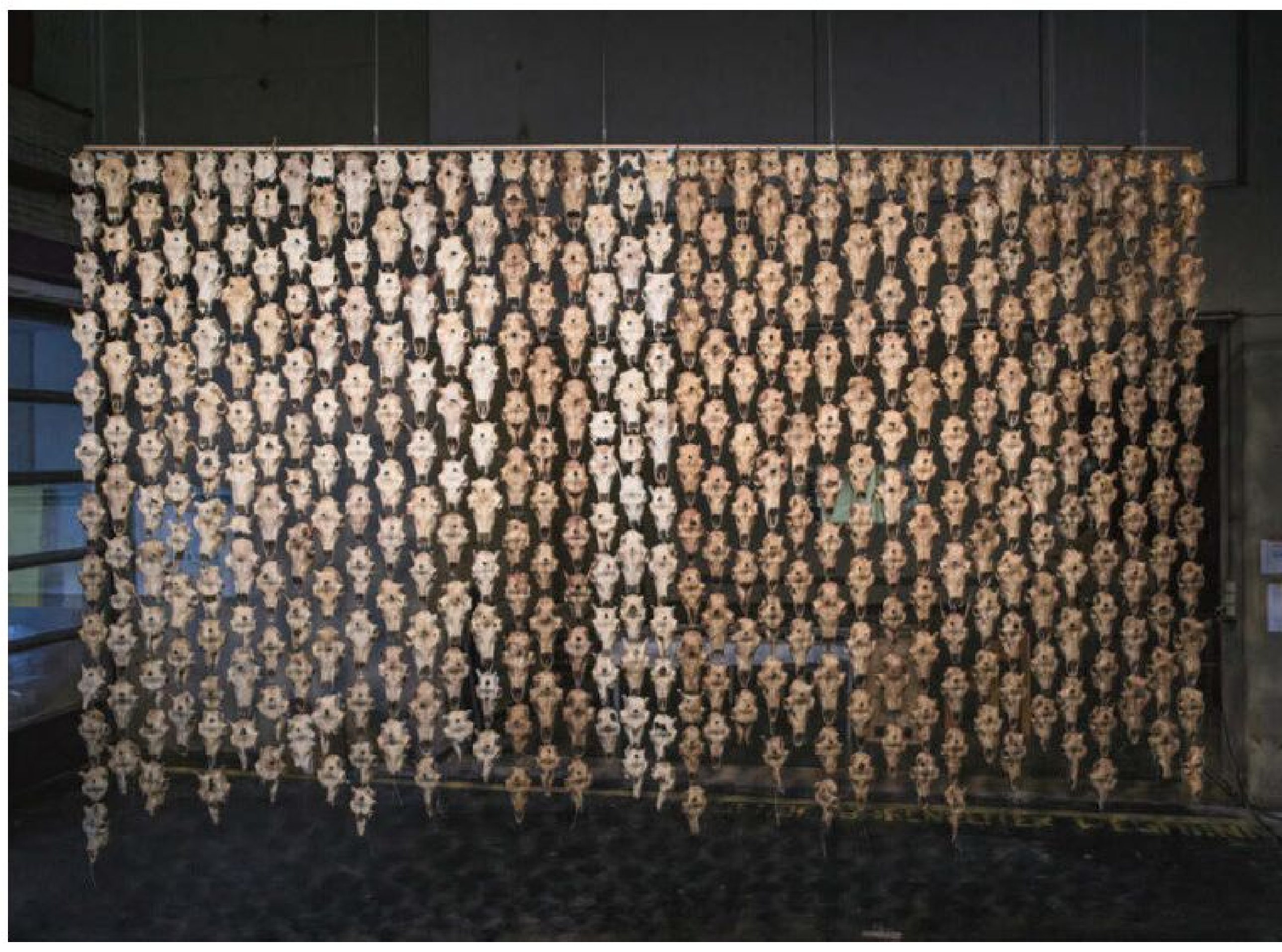
The institution's new building will push "the museum typology to a new place with a fresh approach to the display and reception of art," says Adjaye Associates, the architecture firm behind the design. "Education spaces and artists' studios are presented as a triptych frame that holds the center body of the composition, with the museum offering respite from the bustling city while activating and celebrating the vibrancy of Harlem." Indeed, community remains at the heart of this historic institution: a celebratory Community Day will inaugurate the immense new space in a welcome moment of rejuvenation that will no doubt reverberate throughout Harlem, and far beyond.


BARKLEY L. HENDRICKS
Lawdy Mama, 1969

The Bones of the Matter

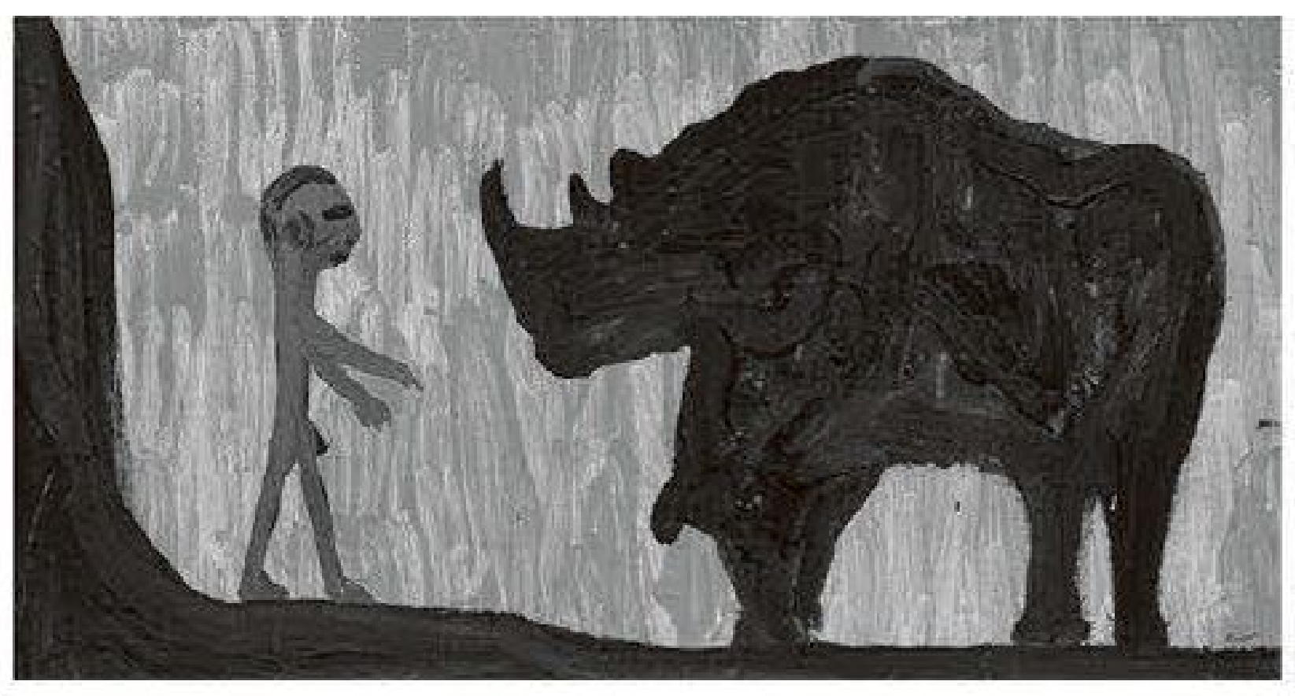
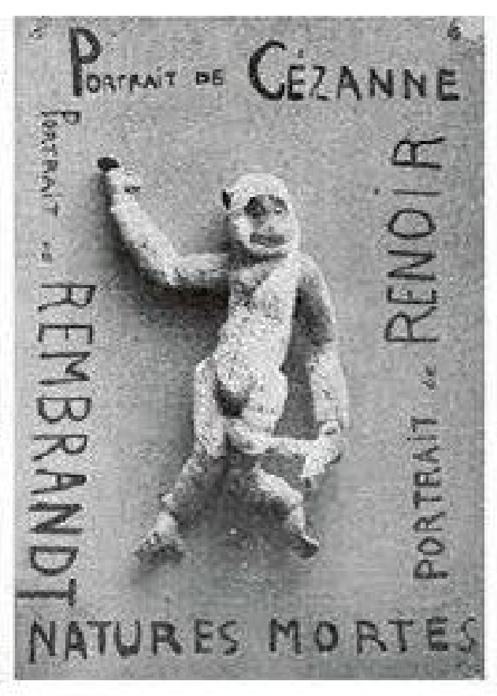

GUTTED-GÁVOGALŠI, 2022

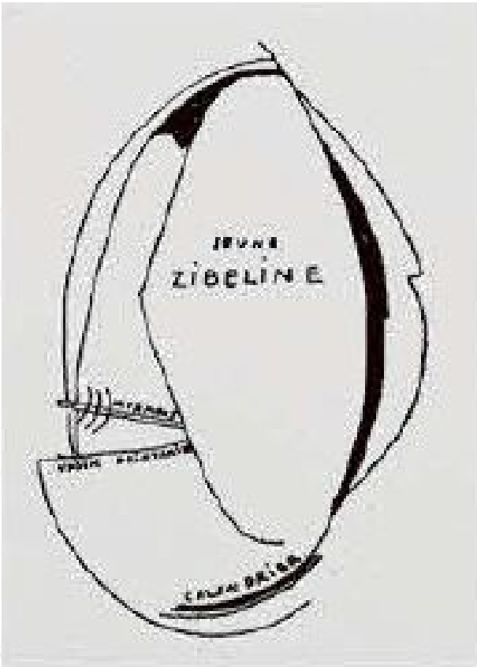
The relationship between humans, animals, and the land is at the beating heart of Máret Ánne Sara's visceral work. Growing up in a reindeer-herding family in Kautokeino, Norway, the Sámi artist and author acquired a firsthand knowledge of the sociopolitical forces stemming from Nordic colonialism that to this day affect the country's Indigenous communities. Sara often employs materials and methods taken directly from reindeer-herding traditions, using animal bones, organs, and carcasses, along with textiles, sound, and video, to interrogate these enduring power structures. Take *Pile o'Sápmi*, an installation of 200 reindeer skulls penetrated by bullet holes. Protesting the government's forced slaughter of reindeer belonging to Indigenous Sámi, the work was displayed outside the Norwegian Parliament in 2016 and in another version the following year at Documenta 14. Then came a breakthrough moment at the Sámi-helmed Nordic Pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennale, where she presented a rotating sculpture made of cured reindeer calves and dried plants from the tundra—"a carrousel of death and birth, fear and joy, trauma and hope." Her current takeover of Tate Modern's cavernous Turbine Hall advocates further for the Sámi community, while speaking poignantly to the universal themes underpinning human existence.

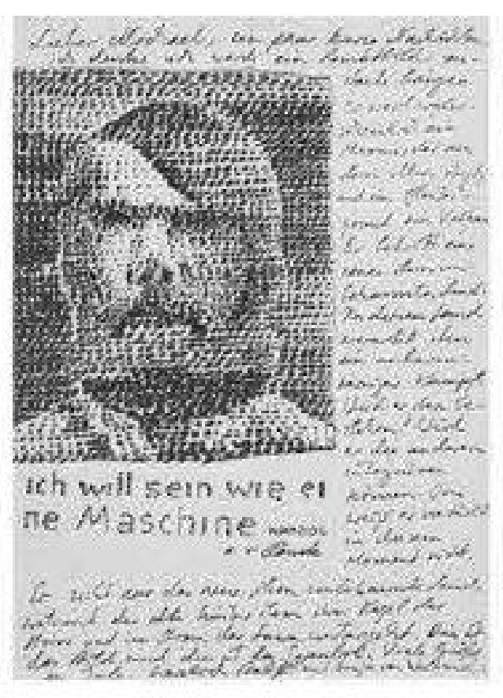

PILE O'SÁPMI SUPREME, 2017

In der durch den Kalten Krieg geteilten Welt trägt der Westwind in den 1960er-Jahren einen Luftballon über den Eisernen Vorhang hinweg. Der Ballon ist mit einem Slogan des US-Künstlers Warhol beschriftet. Im westlichen Winkel des Sowjetreichs, der DDR, fängt ein einziger Künstler diesen Ballon ab und liest: „I think everybody should be a machine“. Die Obrigkeit in Moskau macht Warhol zum Gespött, weil der Amerikaner die verleugnete russische Avantgarde ins Gedächtnis ruft. A.R. Penck, der in Dresden um seine Stellung als Künstler kämpft, kann diesen Fund bestens verwenden. Im Untergrund des sowjetischen Vasallenstaats arbeitet er die „Verschiebung der Haltung Warhols“ aus. Er bringt den Slogan mit dem eigenen Programm auf den neuesten Stand: „The man as a computer“.

In the world divided by World War II, in the 1960s, the west wind whisks an air balloon up and across the Iron Curtain. The balloon bears a slogan by US artist Warhol. In East Germany, the westernmost nook of the Soviet Empire, one single artist intercepts this balloon and reads: “I think everybody should be a machine.” The authorities in Moscow have poured scorn on Warhol because the American brings back memories of the repressed Russian avantgarde. A.R. Penck, who is busy struggling in Dresden to defend his position as an artist, is able to use his find to optimal effect. From his base in the underground in the Soviet vassal state he elaborates a “shift in Warhol’s stance”. With his own program, he updates the slogan to read: “The man as a computer”. Ulf Jensen

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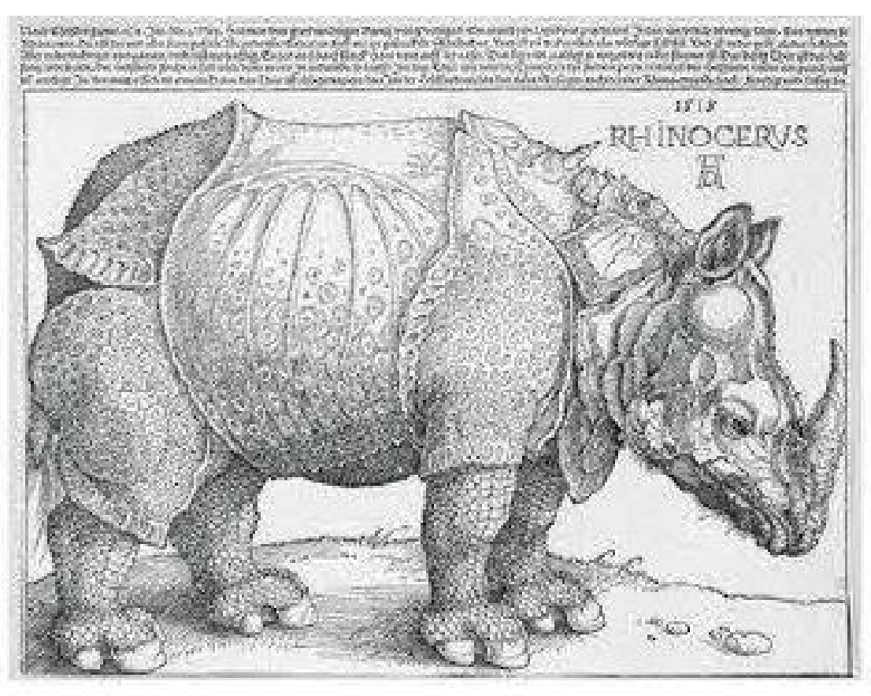

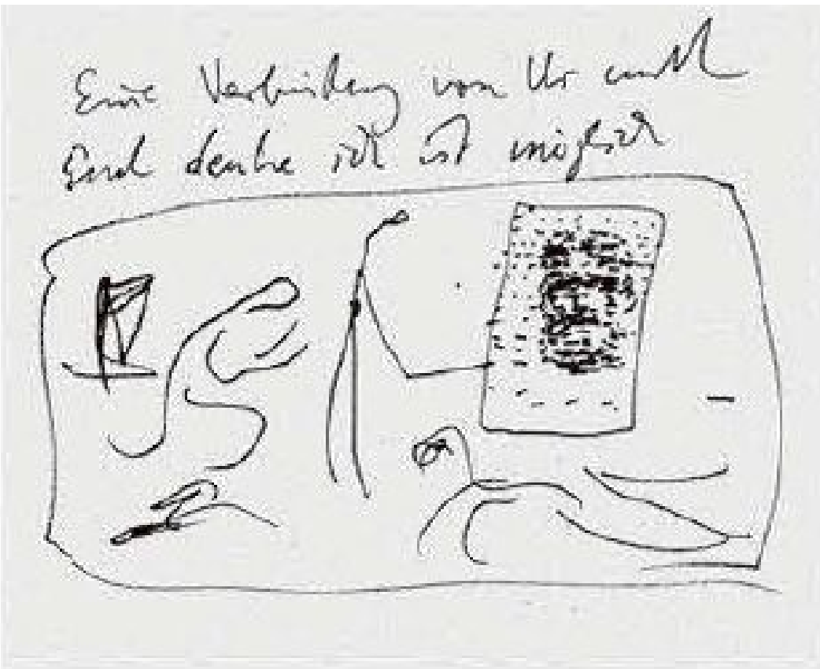

A.R. PENCK

11.9. – 1.11.2025

GALERIE MICHAEL WERNER BERLIN

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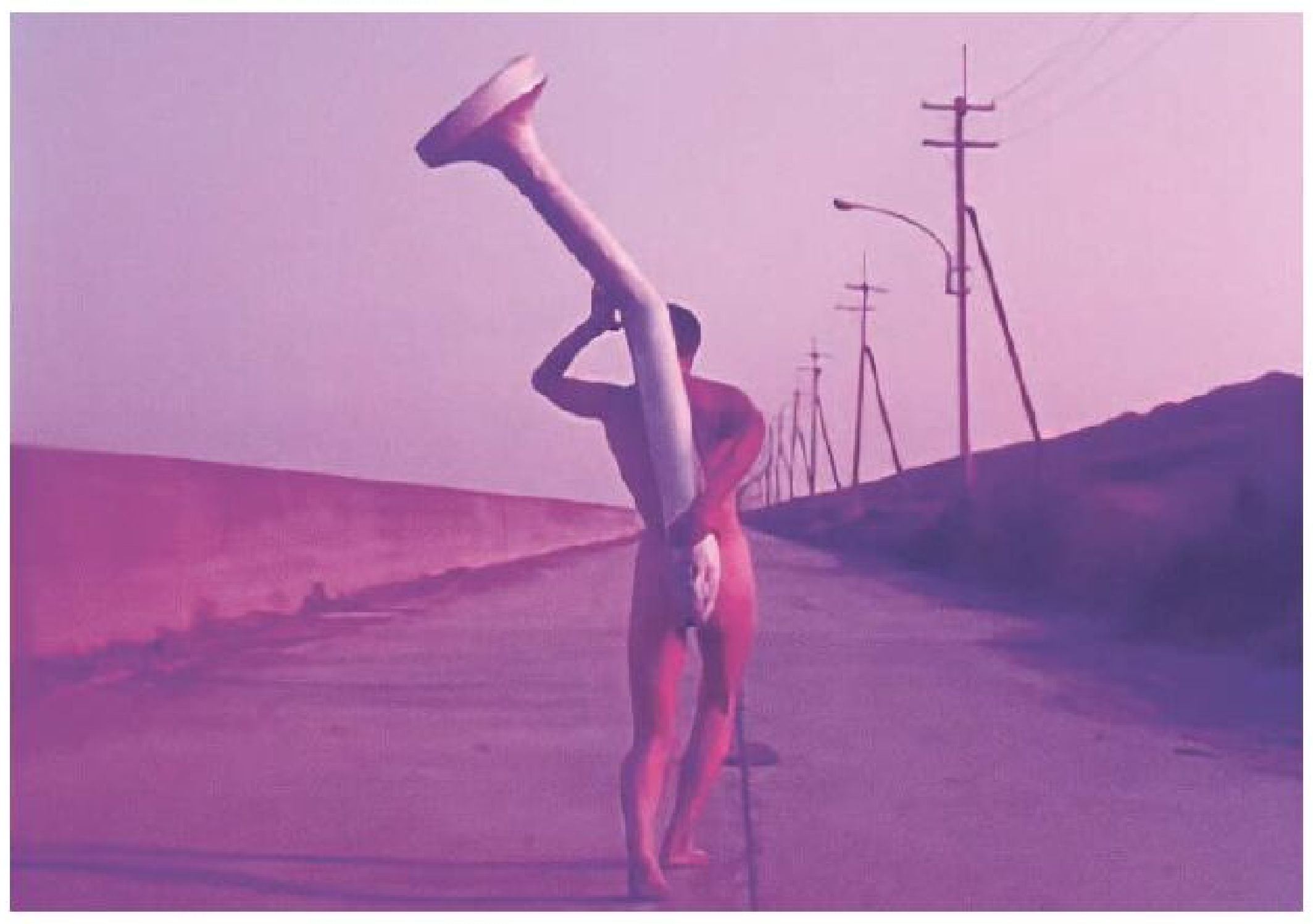
CUP, 1556

Out the Vault

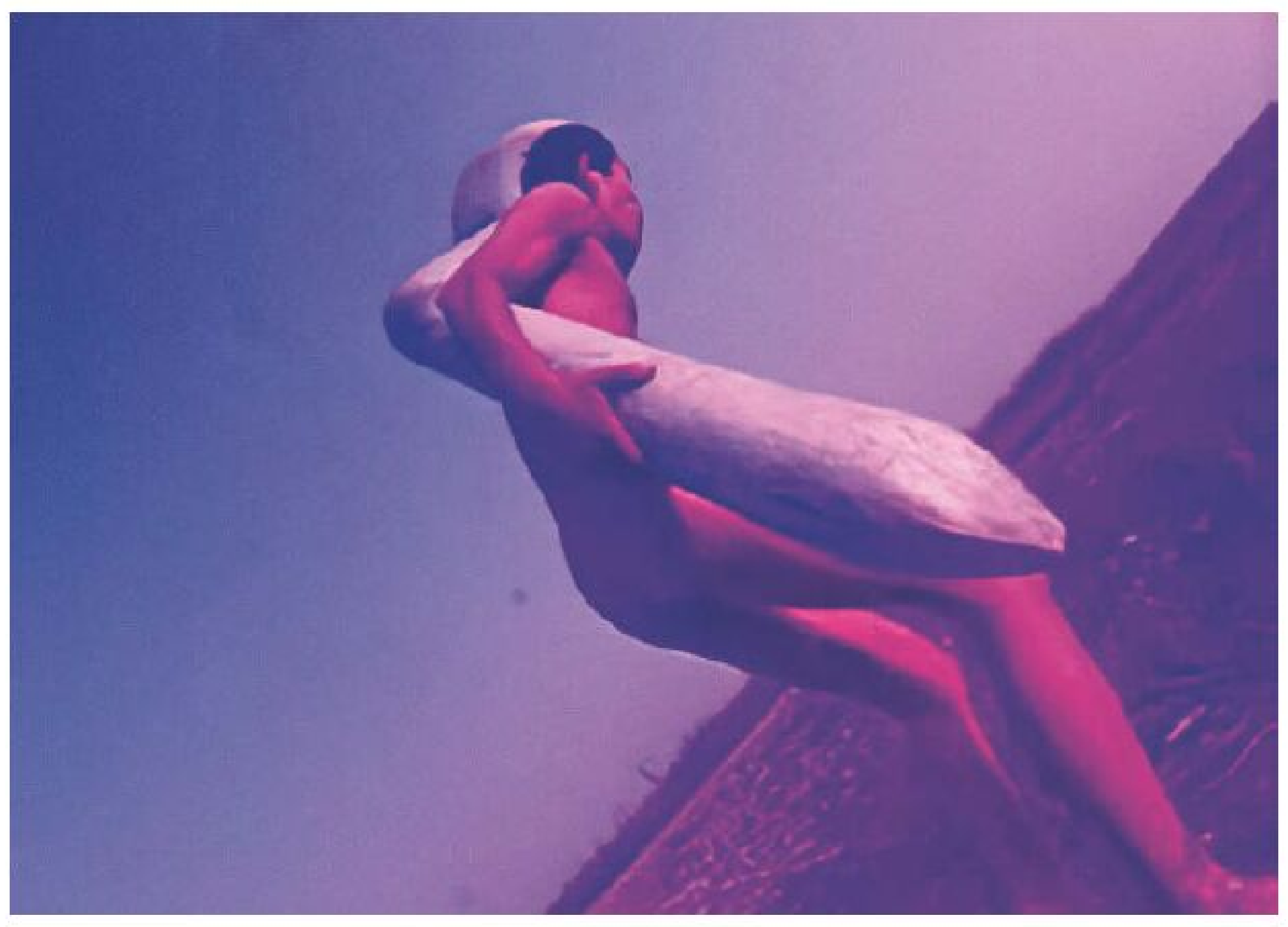
It is both fascinating and unnerving to think of the sheer amount of art that remains, as yet, unseen by the public, carefully preserved almost entirely thanks to a small number of dedicated collectors. The Schroder family is one such example. From the late-19th until the early 20th century, this historic lineage has acquired some of the great treasures of the Renaissance age: works on paper and paintings, bronzes and Italian maiolica, antique engraved gems and remarkable objects in precious metal. At the newly opened Schroder Gallery in Bath's Holburne Museum—and in its catalogue, *A Renaissance Treasury*—these works are available to experience in all their glory, against the backdrop of the grand Grade I-listed building. Among the exhibition's highlights are paintings by Lucas Cranach and Hans Holbein the Elder, and Hans Burgkmair, while the jewels of its silverware include a rare mechanical celestial globe and the *Aldobrandini Tazza*, one of a set of 12 dishes once deemed to be among "the most spectacular groups of 16th-century silver" in existence. A treasury indeed.

NAUTILUS CUP, c. 1580–90

JAPAN'S ART EXPLOSION



TERAYAMA SHŪJI, *The Trial* (film stills), 1975



In Japan, as in so many countries, social turbulence has often prompted an exponential uptick in creative output. During the 1960s and 70s, political unrest and student protests laid the foundations for an artistic explosion, marking out the avant-garde as a force to be reckoned with across Japan, and globally. In *Japan Art Revolution*, the wide-ranging new tome from Thames and Hudson, readers will find more than 600 artworks that trace the evolution of this pioneering movement, from erotic photographs and film stills to *Angura* theater posters, surreal illustrations, and graphic design. An objet d'art in its own right, the book is also a bold and dynamic tribute to the designers who shaped the era's publications. "Encountering books designed by Japanese artists like Yokoo Tadanori and Awazu Kiyoshi was nothing short of a revelation," writes author Amélie Ravalec. "Their designs are a complete sensory overload: an explosion of colors, bold typography, and dynamic graphical elements that leave no space untouched, yet somehow retain a unifying balance." Alongside artworks, the publication draws on extensive interviews with iconic artists and curators, sketching out a rich and nuanced portrait of the artistic landscape of this exceptional chapter in Japanese visual culture.

Delectable Details

Marguerite Yourcenar, 1982

Novelist and essayist Marguerite Yourcenar's autobiography reads like a work of fiction. Born in 1903 to Belgian and French parents, she was ravenous from an early age for art, literature, and culture—and full of strong opinions on it all. She wrote prolifically throughout her life. Having relocated from France to the USA in 1939 to avoid the war, she set up a home there with her partner, Grace Frick. Yourcenar found critical acclaim with her novel *Memoirs of Hadrian* in the 1950s, was nominated for the Nobel Prize in 1965, and in 1981 became the first woman to join the Académie Française—where the signage on the men's bathroom doors was amended to permit her entry. Happily, Yourcenar's writing is as delectable as her life story; all its richness and devout attention to detail is poured into her subjects, be that the work of Piranesi, Dürer, or Michelangelo's masterful and provocative nude frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. In *A Dream of Stone*, newly published by David Zwirner Books this November, these three jewel-like essays can be found alongside two others—works so significant they may as well be inscribed in marble.

Texts by
DAISY WOODWARD

6 rue St-Georges | St-Jorisstraat

Magdalene Odundo

13 November 2025 — 24 January 2026

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker

5 — 14 February 2026

Thomas Houseago

5 March — 9 May 2026

44 rue Van Eyck | Van Eyckstraat

Alice Neel

25 September — 22 November 2025

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Bertrand Lavier

15 January — 21 March 2026

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CARRIED AWAY

LEILA HEKMAT *views* Peter Greenaway

DROWNING BY NUMBERS, 1988

THE DRAUGHTSMAN'S CONTRACT, 1982

THE FALLS, 1980

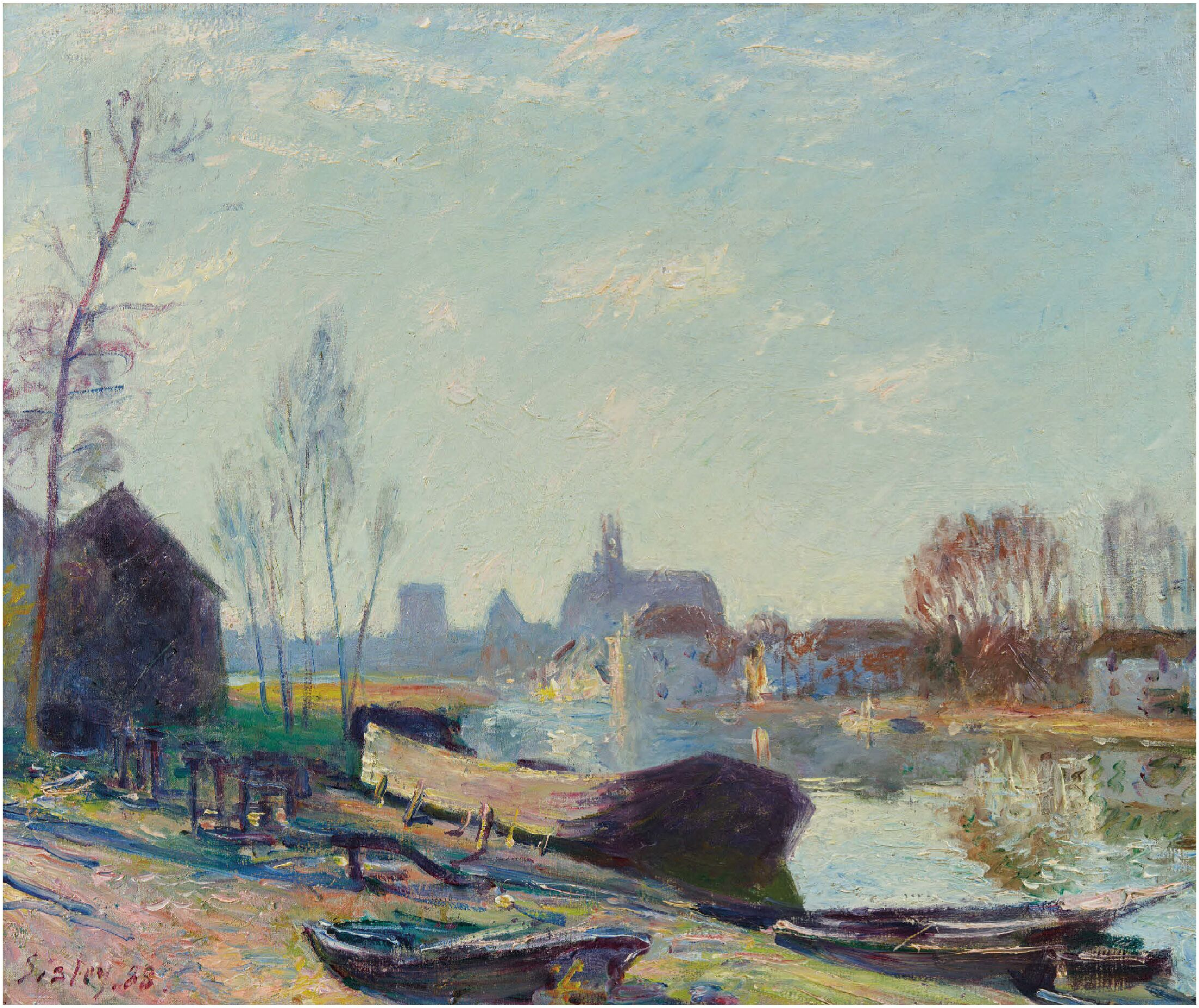
I was always a late bloomer. Still blooming actually. Still trying to decide what it is I'm doing every day. Lately, I am an artist dabbling their toes into film and film-like deviations in practice. I studied photography 25 years ago, but didn't know how images would apply to my practice until recently. Probably Peter Greenaway provided the map for how to get carried away with the images. Greenaway is a painter, actually. He ripples the rapple of the artificiality of film as a form. He leans into structuralist perversions and uses them ephemerally as well as anecdotally.

Greenaway's first great eruption onto my sensory apparatus was in the form of *The Falls* (1980). Uncanny vignettes, anecdotal topographies of factual-fictional dry documentarian lists, and lists of stories. All fake of course. *The Falls* is the most obvious example of his penchant for frames: 92 biographies arranged like encyclopedia entries. Newsreel stories from the 1970s, recounted in numerical order, depicting survivors of the Violent Unknown Event, all toting last names beginning with Fall. Propine Fallax, Melorder Fallabur, Pollie Fallory, deadpan satirical survivals with resulting afflictions—the mastery of alien tongues, or bodies reshaped in ways that echo bird forms.

Visual puns, mathematical puzzles, and image-based dialogues, Greenaway composes a system, a code of conduct, if you will, in which to apply a narrative. *Drowning by Numbers* (1988) literally counts from one to 100, like a child's game hidden in the mise-en-scène. This is a story of three women who drown their husbands—one in a bath, one in the sea, and one in a swimming pool. The humor is very dry but the film is totally wet. The abecedarian or numeric sequence is not, however, my frame. It works subtly, silkily for Greenaway, but it's too constricting for me. My framework is often stimulated by a location. Within a location, an occurrence of contrasting nature, incomplete—the frame will hold it all in place even if the narrative is unwieldy. Three drownings, three autopsies, three funerals, and three reckonings. You're not allowed to escape. I am inspired by these narratives which are always presented with irony, formality, or playful detachment. Here comes the Brechtian alienation duvet draped over your legs. I like seeing people in a state of crisis while I'm sitting in a car. Keep your distance.

The Draughtsman's Contract (1982) is structured around 12 drawings and a contractual agreement. The contract is a game of power and barter, with sexual favors traded like moves. A sequence of painterly images connecting glowing whispers of campy conspiracies and more murderous plots. But it's Greenaway's light, not his frames, that seduces me most. I have tried hard to plagiarize *The Draughtsman's Contract*'s light, which is also quite painty. Blunt, bucolic daytime landscapes fold into hazy velvet midnights where the baroque figures meet. The light does not want to be rendered in text. It's impossible to articulate the melodic, painterly way faces collide with the night air. We see just enough. "You must forgive my curiosity, madam, open your knees."

I found this on page three of Greenaway's book on *Drowning by Numbers*: "Many of the scenes are shot in the orange light of dawn or sunset … or shot at night—a night for the most part quietly benevolent … but occasionally erupting into enigmatic and ambiguous malevolence." It's not difficult to be attracted to this. Quite forgivable to take inspiration. Or plagiarize.



ALFRED SISLEY Le Chantier à Matrat-Moret. 1888, Oil on canvas, 38.5 x 46.4 cm. Auction in Cologne, 4 Dec. 2025. Estimate: € 400,000

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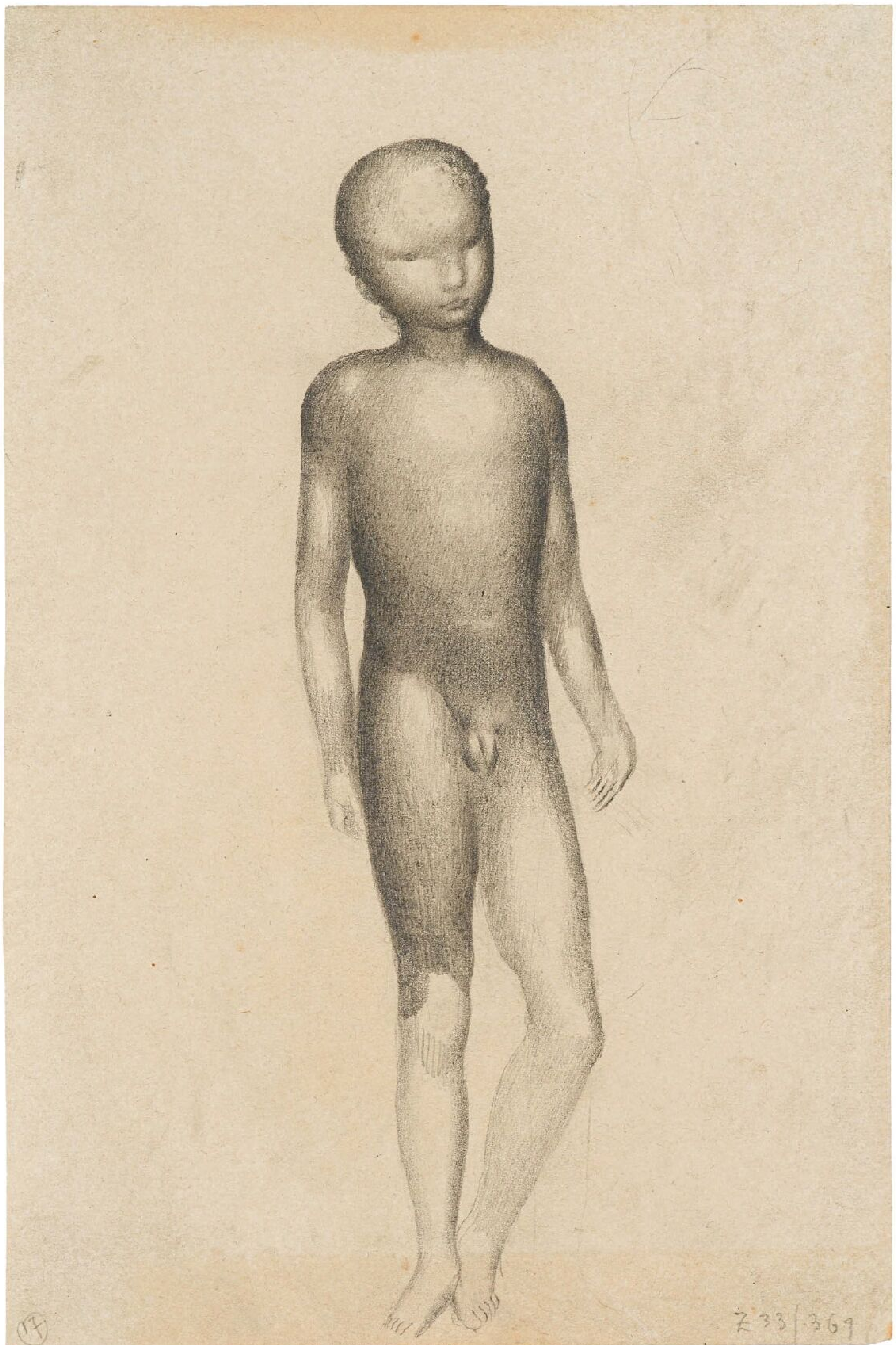
RADIANT BODIES

by ELISA TAMASCHKE

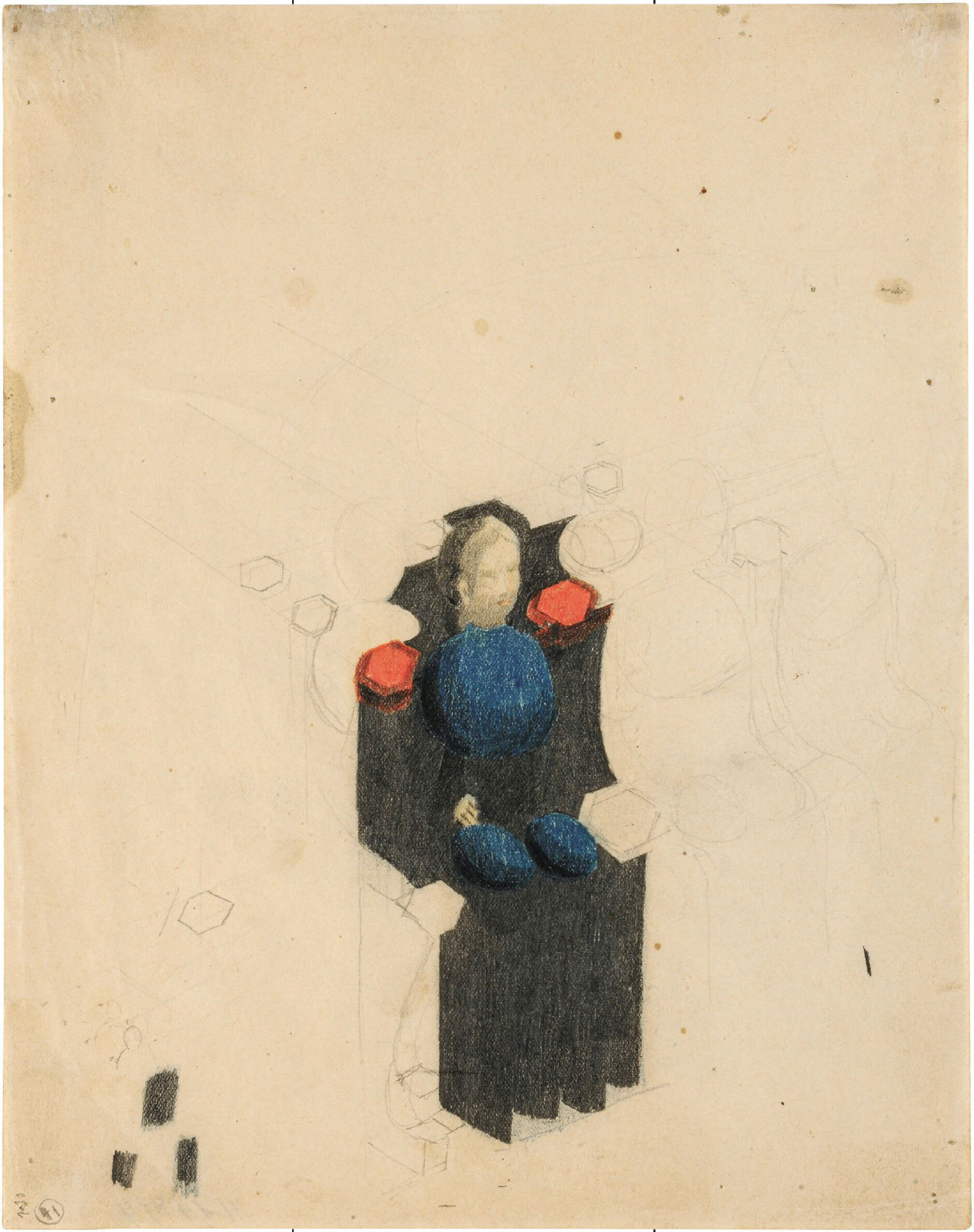


Living in solitude up in the Swiss Alps, OTTO MEYER-AMDEN was both ahead and outside of his time, shaping his vision of an eternally youthful brotherhood

Almost 100 years after his death, the Swiss painter and draughtsman Otto Meyer-Amden remains mostly unknown to the art-loving public. Even during his lifetime he was surrounded by a kind of aura, more of a legend than a man of flesh and blood. “Hardly anyone knows where he lives or what he paints,” stated an article in 1918. Meyer-Amden was then 33 years old, too young to have disappeared like a fairytale figure to some faraway land. But he really did live in isolation, in the mountain village of Amden, above the Walensee in the canton of St. Gallen. Geographically not all that distant from Zurich, yet far from its hustle and bustle, he managed to keep himself informed about the international art

KNABENAKT (STUDY FOR ALGRAPHIE), 1923, pencil on paper, 23 × 14 cm

Otto Meyer-Amden



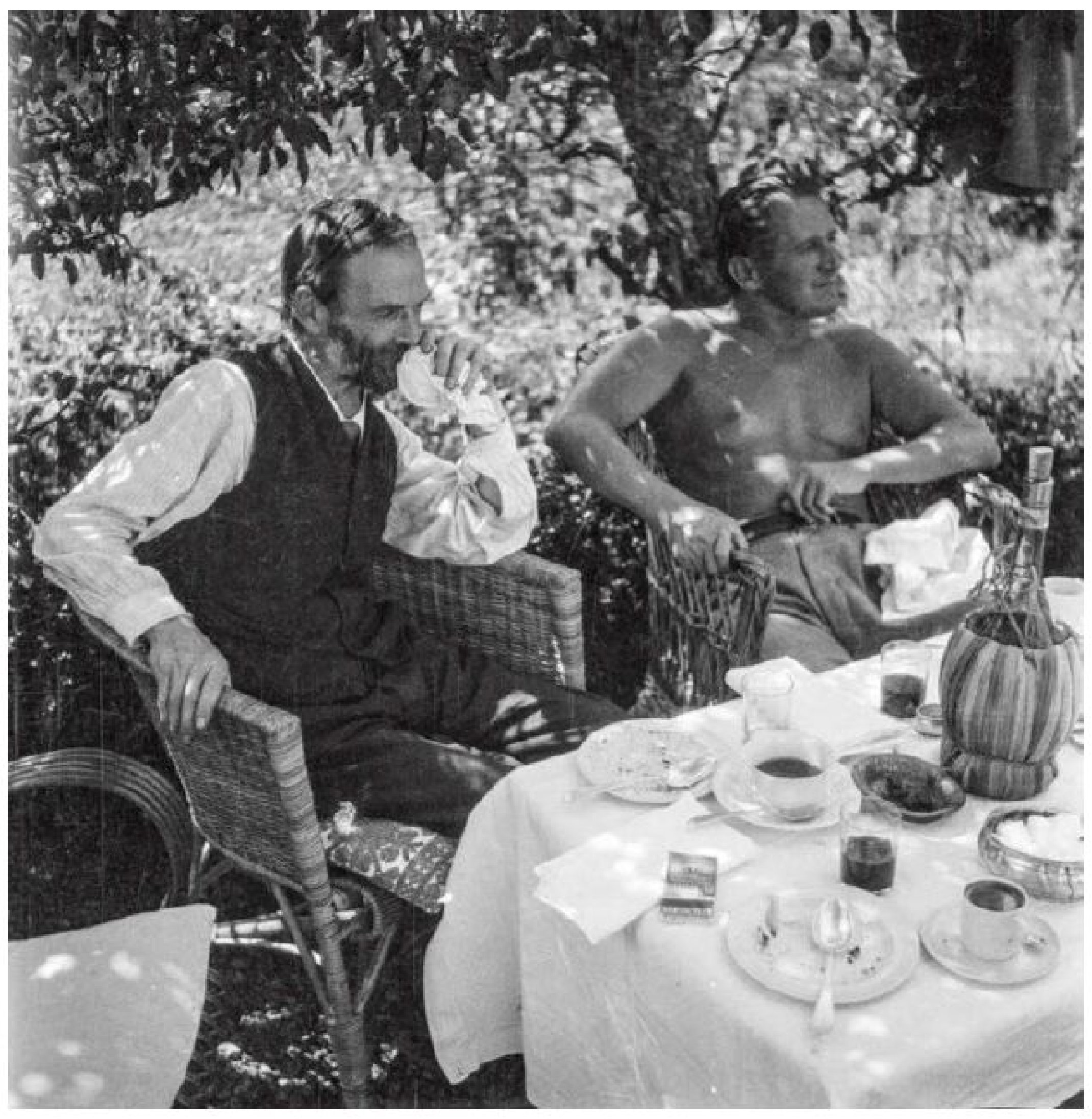
IM MÜNSTER (ERWARTUNG), study for the stained glass window in the Zwinglihaus Zurich-Wiedikon, 1923–24, pencil and colored pencil on paper, 28 × 22 cm scene through his intensive correspondence with his artist friends. Still, he was never part of the movements of his day. Meyer-Amden painted his own personal mythology, up there in the hills, entirely alone.

Born Otto Meyer in Bern in 1885, the artist was just three years old when his mother passed away. After a short stay with a foster family, he was enrolled at the local orphanage, where he underwent a religious and military education. His experience at the boarding school, in particular of the rooms and his fellow students, would leave an immense impression, eventually forming some of the artist's most important motifs. At 16, he started an apprenticeship in lithography, and three years later he relocated to Zurich, holding a position at a lithographic workshop and, in the evenings, taking classes at the local school for applied arts. His most formative training, however, took place from 1907 to 1910 at Stuttgart's State Academy of Fine Arts, where he studied with the painter Adolf Hölzel and became friends with classmates Oskar Schlemmer and Willi Baumeister.

For Oskar Schlemmer, these partly gnomic drawings were to serve as an artistic refrain throughout his life's work

Right: HÄNDEHOCHHALTENDE (ANTWORTEN), STUDY IV
Colored pencil on paper, 22 × 17 cm

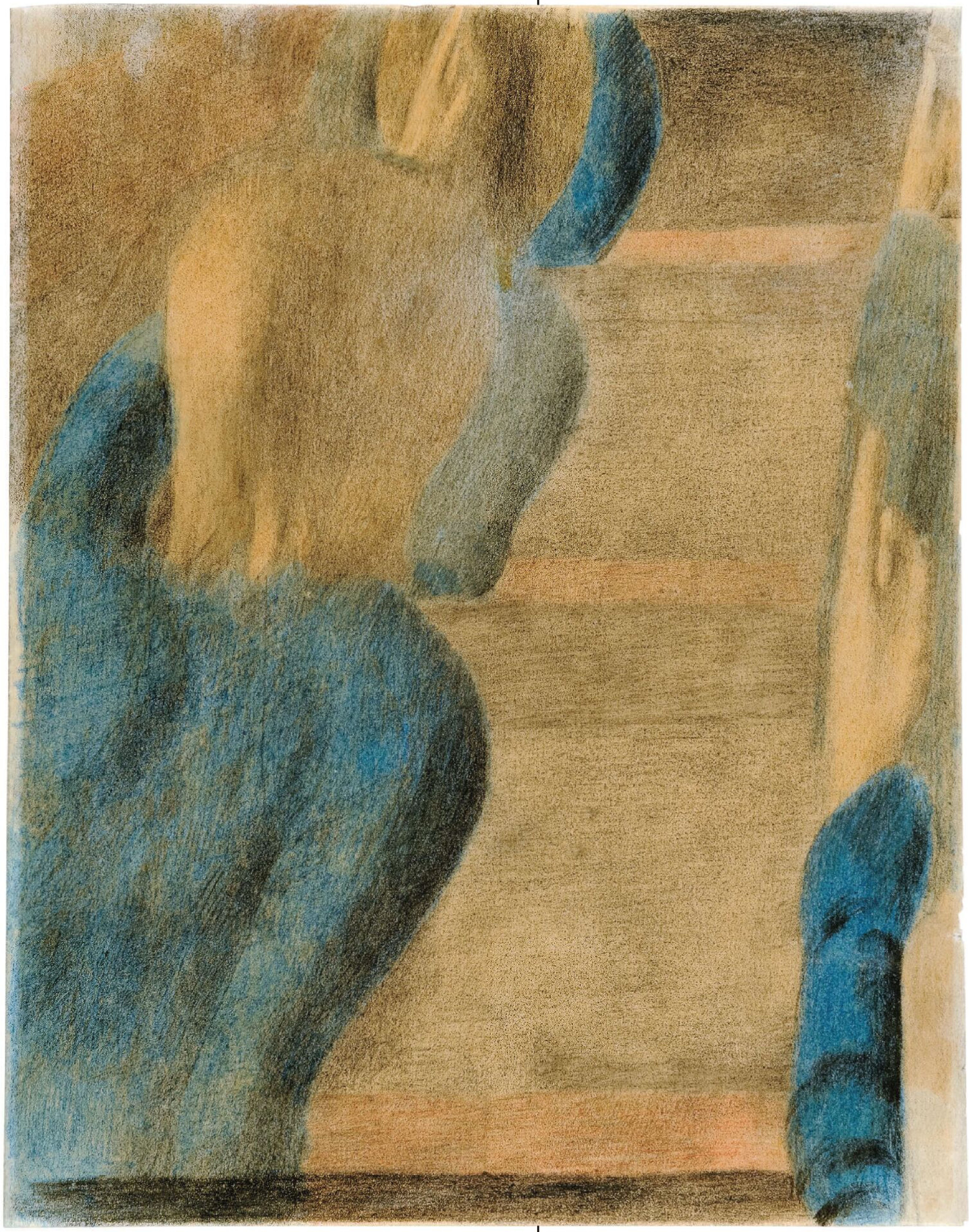
Otto Meyer-Amden and Hermann Huber photographed by Willi Baumeister, 1932



These two better-known German artists, crucial as they were to the development of modernist forms and motifs, in fact owe much to their Swiss peer. In Schlemmer's case, it is important to note that some of his most iconic images can be traced back to the works of Meyer-Amden—Schlemmer's 1922 signet for the Bauhaus, for instance, a head in profile that originates in ideas Meyer-Amden developed from 1909 onwards. Schlemmer was to be a life-long supporter of Meyer-Amden, often helping his works on their way to a public audience. When, in 1913, the German artist invited his friend to participate in an exhibition at his Stuttgart art salon, Meyer-Amden accepted only reluctantly, asking that his name not be mentioned—an unusual strategy for a destitute young artist whose works tended to challenge traditional viewing habits. At the time, one critic wrote, "Then there is another artist, who does not want to be named, which I understand." Meyer-Amden's drawings in that show could best be called metaphysical—human figures appearing in geometric grids or on cosmic black backgrounds, not as living beings but rather as symbols. For Schlemmer, these partly gnomic drawings were to serve as an artistic refrain throughout his life's work. Recognizing the modernity and peculiarity of his friend's work, he had to overcome his disappointment when, a few years later, Meyer-Amden developed completely different, more lyrical motifs.

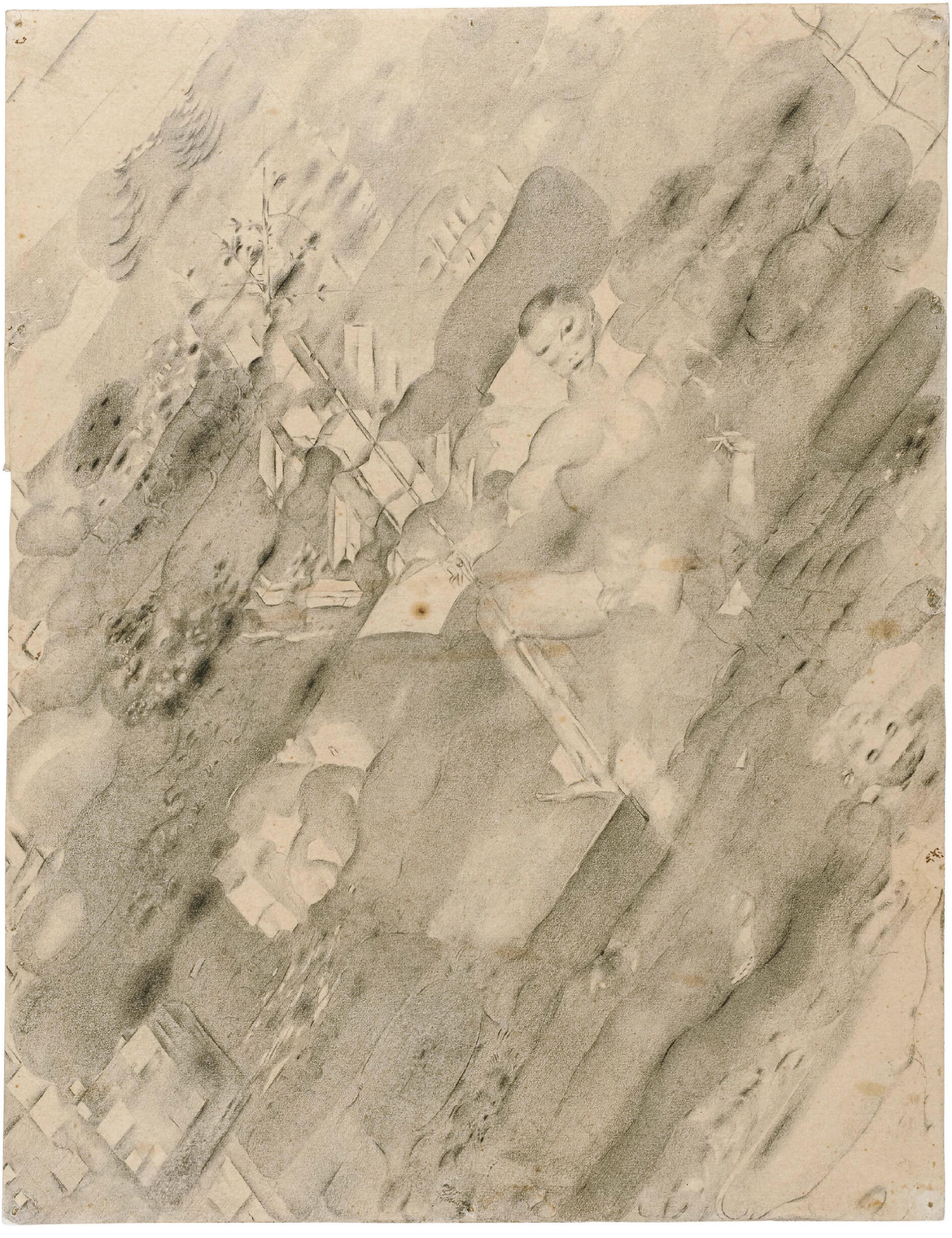
By the time of the Stuttgart exhibition, Meyer-Amden had already been living in the village of Amden for a little over a year. Seeking a more natural state of life, friends of the artist had intended to create an artist colony in the Swiss countryside. That dream didn't last long. But while his peers, including Baumeister, all left rather quickly, Meyer-Amden stayed on. Unable to afford to live anywhere else, he helped the local farmers bring in the hay, grew his own fruit and vegetables, and immersed himself in his imagery, which he refined more and more. Throughout, he remained in touch with his colleagues, especially Schlemmer. The two exchanged over 300 letters before Meyer-Amden's untimely death in 1933, focusing on questions of art, but also of politics and current events such as World War I and the rise of National Socialism, a development that Meyer-Amden found interesting but likely misunderstood. There was just one period, between 1919 and 1920, during which Schlemmer and Meyer-Amden didn't write to one another, due to a dispute over a painting, *Im Münster I* (1918–19), from the latter's new series, the so-called *School Pictures*. In the beginning, Schlemmer did not consider them modern. For Meyer-Amden, on the other hand, they felt like a breakthrough.

Finally, the artist had found the framework for motifs he had long sought, even longed for, and he kept perfecting their expression through extensive series in graphite, crayon, oil, and watercolor. He drew on his childhood at the Bern boarding school, translating it into representations of an idealized community of boys. In scholastic spaces—dormitory, refectory, classroom—the young men gather for evening readings, morning devotions, meals, or lessons. These are images full of tranquility and contemplation. Hardly a teacher appears in them, focused as they are on the boys and their peaceful brotherhood. Across Meyer-Amden's numerous studies and completed works, the scenes are painted with little variation. For more than a decade, the artist circled the same motifs over and over, transforming them into increasingly abstracted images in which narrative disappears behind elaborate geometric shapes. For many artists, such a fixation on the conceptual has been pathologized, but for Meyer-Amden it was simply an artistic means to clarify the atmosphere of his images—and thus their expression, their effectiveness. The artist wrestled with himself. In 1920, he wrote, "Recently, I expressed myself in the following way: I have once again advanced from the laboratory into the labyrinth and I am trying every skeleton key to get out and reap my reward."



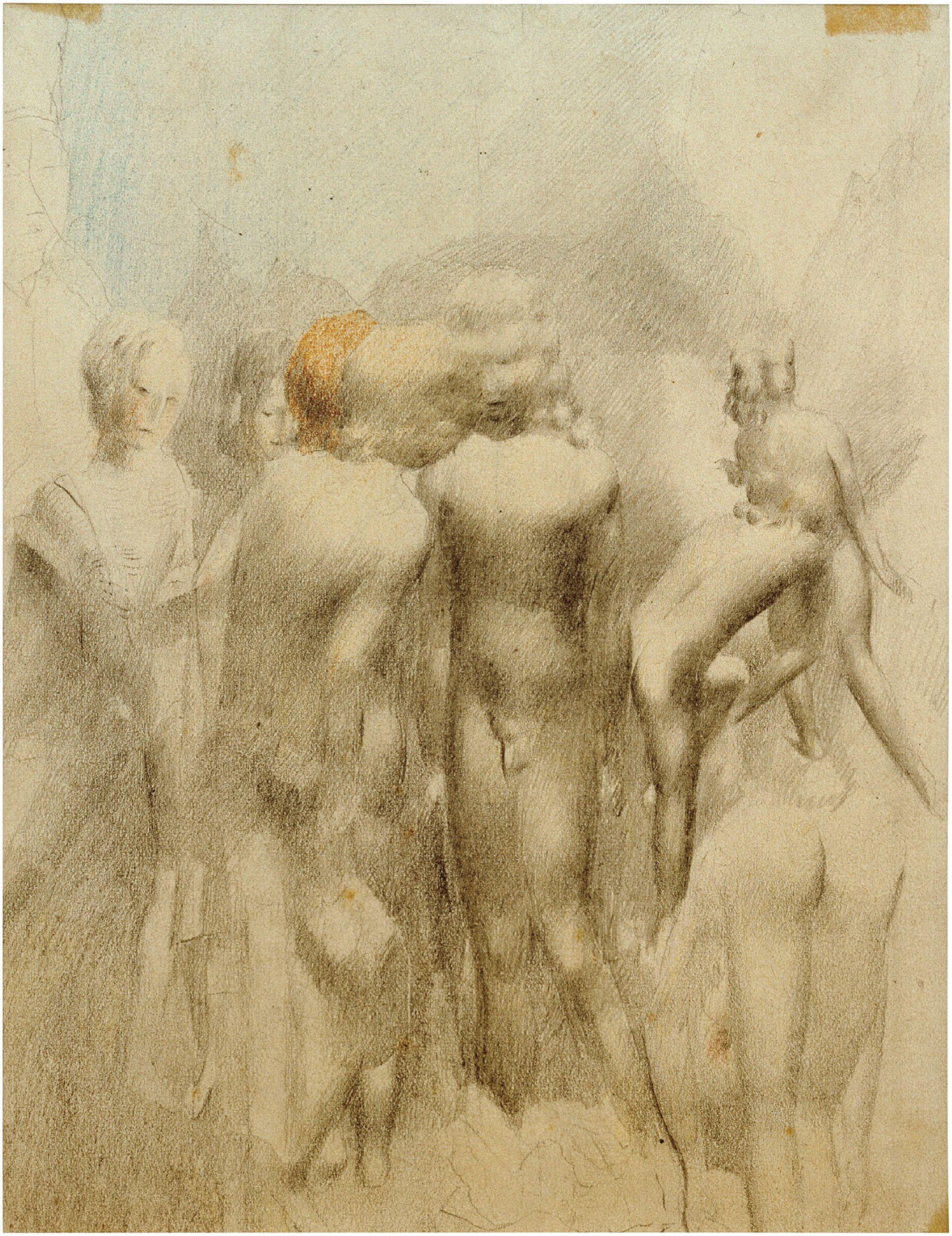
The *key*—his often-desperate search to achieve the effect he intended—is also a recurring theme in his correspondence. His work is littered with notes instructing himself on how to employ color and shape in order to bring about certain atmospheric resonances. And although it was primarily through color, including many shades of gray, that Meyer-Amden modeled his motifs, he was adept at setting them in motion at the same time. The way he applied pigment evokes a kind of flicker, a blur that sometimes makes the motifs disappear as if behind a veil, merely intuitable. In his work, the material has an intrinsic value. It is part of the image's content and narrative, forming the basis of their conveyance. Just how deliberate Meyer-Amden's formal intentions were becomes clear from one such note on his refectory drawings: "some smaller and larger round / to close […] the form / whispered noise. / Large horizontal lines, radiating in parallel / a quiet, large sound / striking these waves / with the best accompaniment in a good place." In these images, students sit at long tables in the morning light, bowls in front of them and hymnals in their hands, and in many, one boy leans over slightly to whisper something to a neighbor. Clearly, Meyer-Amden linked the whisperings with the sounds that color and shape engendered in him.

Meyer-Amden's reluctance to show at Schlemmer's salon in 1913 developed into a characteristic attitude. Although he would occasionally participate in exhibitions, he always hesitated. For him, the way his works reached the viewer was the crucial thing. He preferred to look at and discuss them together. What he was really after was a certain visual effect, not any public showing or sale. His caution also came down to his fear of being misunderstood—which, given that his oeuvre was rife with abstracted nudes of boys and ones drawn from life, was probably

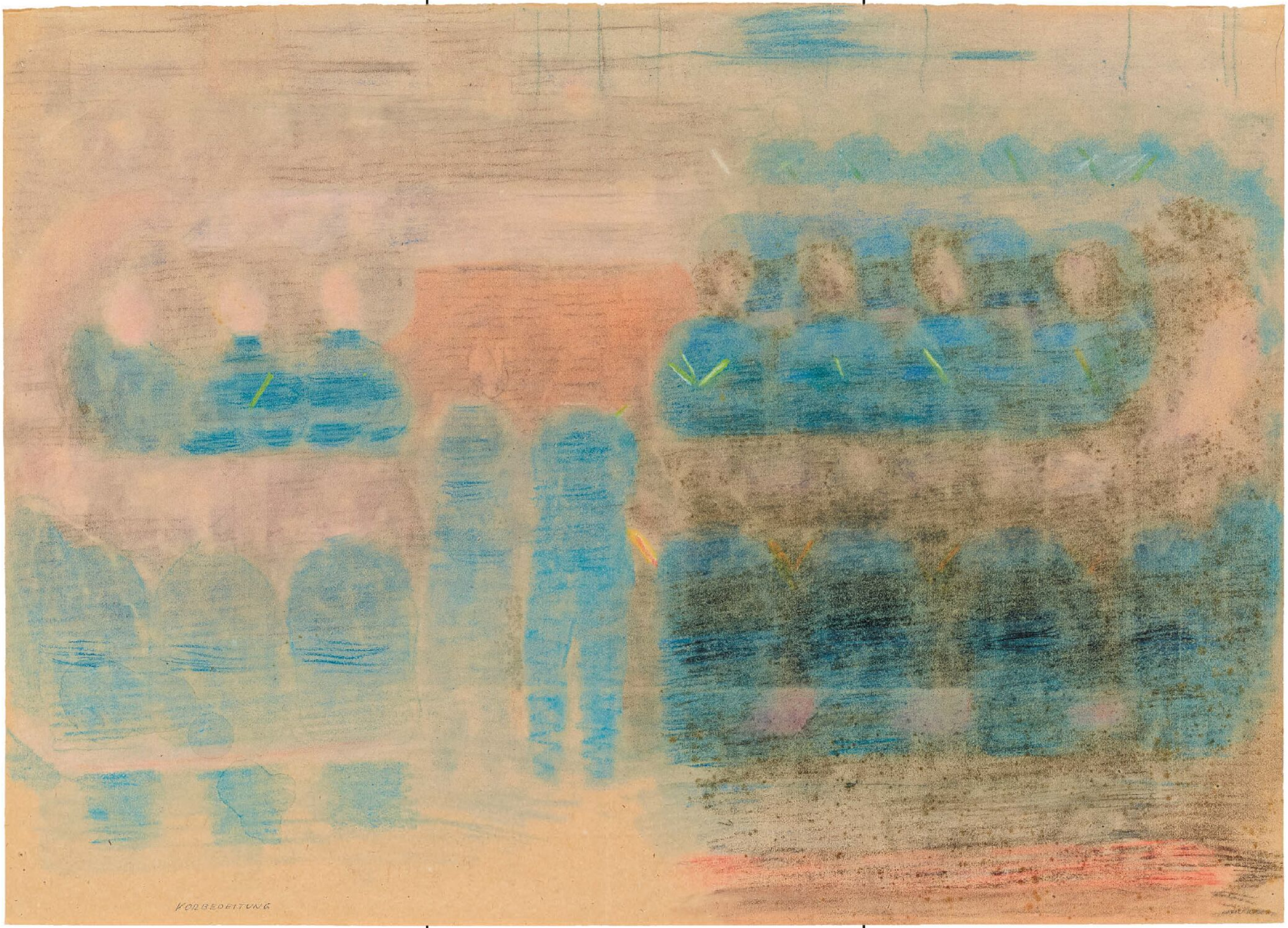


DIAGONAL-KOMPOSITION
(AUFERSTEHUNGSMOTIV), c. 1913–15
Pencil on paper, 32 × 25 cm

Otto Meyer-Amden



GRUPPEN NACKTER KNABEN IM FREIEN
(BADENDE), c. 1919
Pencil and colored pencil on paper, 19 × 14 cm



unavoidable. More than anything, the paintings evince Meyer-Amden’s interest in Egyptian and Greek sculpture, having come to know the forms at Munich’s Glyptothek, the Louvre, and in Waldemar Deonna’s 1909 book, *Les “Apollons Archaïques*.” He could thus be compared with the artists of the Jünglingskult, a movement that, at the beginning of the 20th century, celebrated the adolescent boy as part and parcel of an enthusiastic and multifaceted reception of antiquity. Sometimes formally oriented toward archaic *kouroi* and the portal statue columns at Chartres, his nude drawings are at other times downright utopian, extraterrestrial visions without art-historical precedent. Meyer-Amden’s references to antiquity also helped him reflect on and legitimate his homosexuality. While respected by his friends, his sexuality was, however, occasionally the basis of his rejection by those outside his narrow circle. It even led to the cancellation of an order for a stained-glass window in Rüschlikon on Lake Zurich, when, in 1926, the artist was defamed by a member of the commissioning body who alleged that his drawings of male nudes, exhibited at Kunsthaus Zürich two years before, were pornographic. During that exhibition, Meyer-Amden wrote Schlemmer: “The criticism and approval of my work in the exhibition seems to be radical, either one way or the other. Close friends criticize it harshly. Expressions such as sick, perverse, feminine, homosexual go openly among them, obliquely to myself.”

In 1928, Meyer left the village of Amden. His rent had gone up, and longing for an urban environment, he moved to Zurich. He’d been offered a position teaching the unpretentious subject of technical drawing at the School of Applied Arts, where surprisingly the artist was able to find a niche for himself. His pedagogy

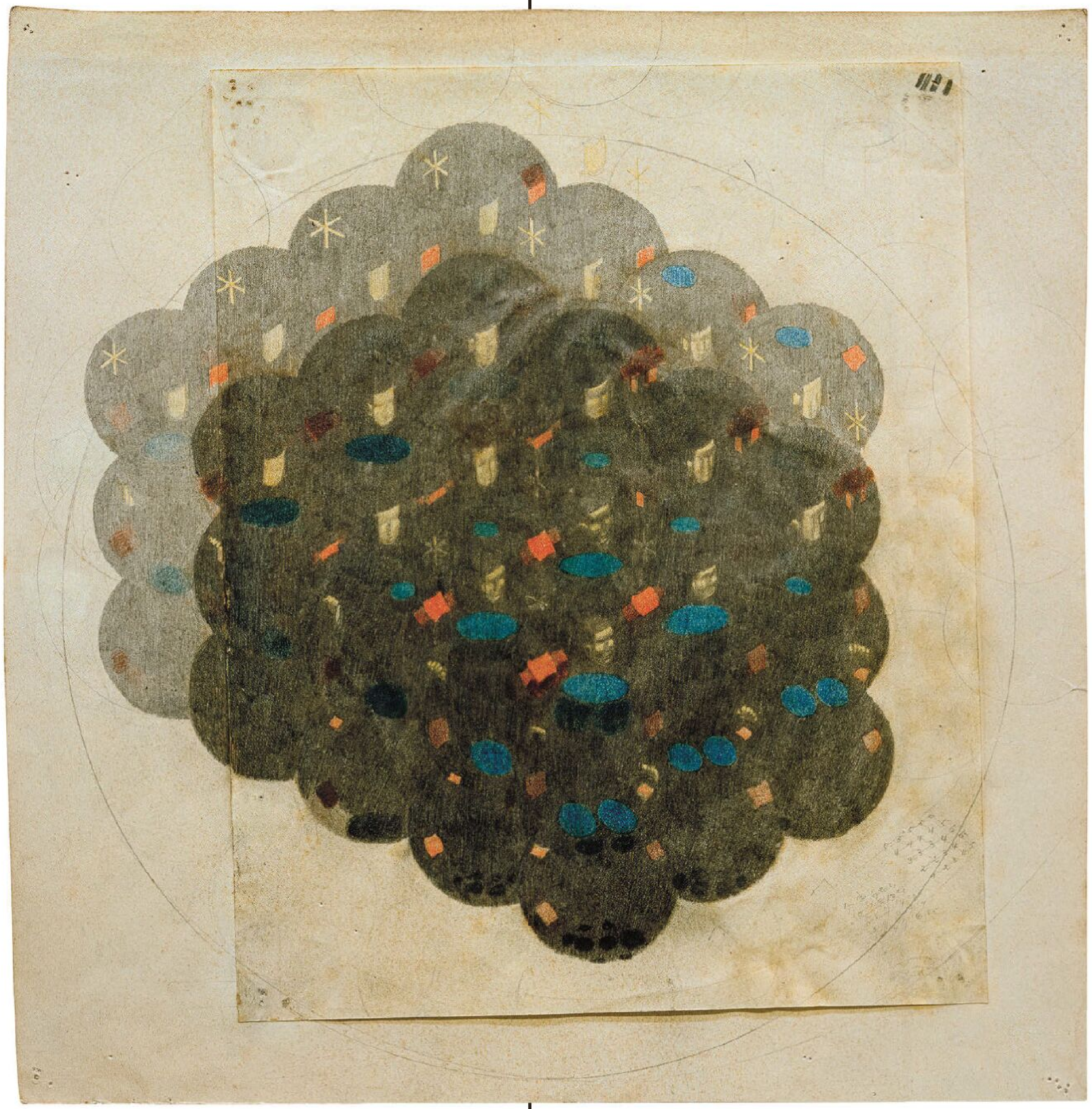
Meyer-Amden's experience at boarding school would leave an immense impression, eventually forming some of the artist's most important motifs

centered around having students draw the things they carried in their pockets, everyday objects, familiar things they loved. Some of these students' drawings have been preserved alongside their teacher's notes in the school's archives, and they even resemble some of Meyer-Amden's own works. Having always understood his art as a form of communication between himself, the image, and the viewer, the painter was now able to convey his ideas through conversations with his students. He also had an influence at another school, again through his old friend Schlemmer. While teaching at the art school in Wrocław (then Breslau), the German painter showed a small selection of Meyer-Amden's works in 1931—without his friend's knowledge, of course, as he probably would never have agreed to such a showing. Afterwards, however, Schlemmer was happy to write his colleague about the students' enthusiastic reactions. The painter Georg Muche was also "a massive admirer."

In 1932, Meyer-Amden had to give up teaching due to laryngeal disease, and in January the following year, he passed away. As executor of his estate, Schlemmer created an initial list of works and dedicated a large-format publication to him. Memorial exhibitions were held at the Kunsthaus Zürich, the Kunsthalle Basel, and the Kunsthalle Bern, and numerous exuberant obituaries appeared, commemorating Meyer-Amden as an incomparable force—and still today, he is considered one of the most important painters to have ever come out of Switzerland. His mystical and often enigmatic work has gained him a significant following, especially among artists. Yet, all his life, and even to this day, Meyer-Amden remained an outsider. He never joined any school or movement, rather creating for himself alone. So, too, does he defy all of art's -isms. His images and ideas were neither absorbed by those of the Bauhaus nor by any other technical-materialist reflections on the so-called New Man. Although he was informed about, and involved in, the discourses of his time, he sought an independent path through an ultimately private mythology that can never be completely decoded, and perhaps that is why it remains so powerful. Anyone who appreciates his work as an asymptotic approach to some ideal gestalt, one that can only distantly be related to an ideal fraternity of young men, will find in Meyer-Amden one of the finest artists of the early 20th century—one who can be rediscovered again and again.

Left: STUDY FOR VORBEREITUNG, 1932
Chalk on paper, 51 × 70 cm

IM MÜNSTER (ERWARTUNG),
study for the stained glass window in the Zwinglihaus Zurich-Wiedikon, 1924
Pencil and colored pencil on folded and collaged paper, 32 × 32 cm



CHARLINE VON HEYL

PUSER
GTS
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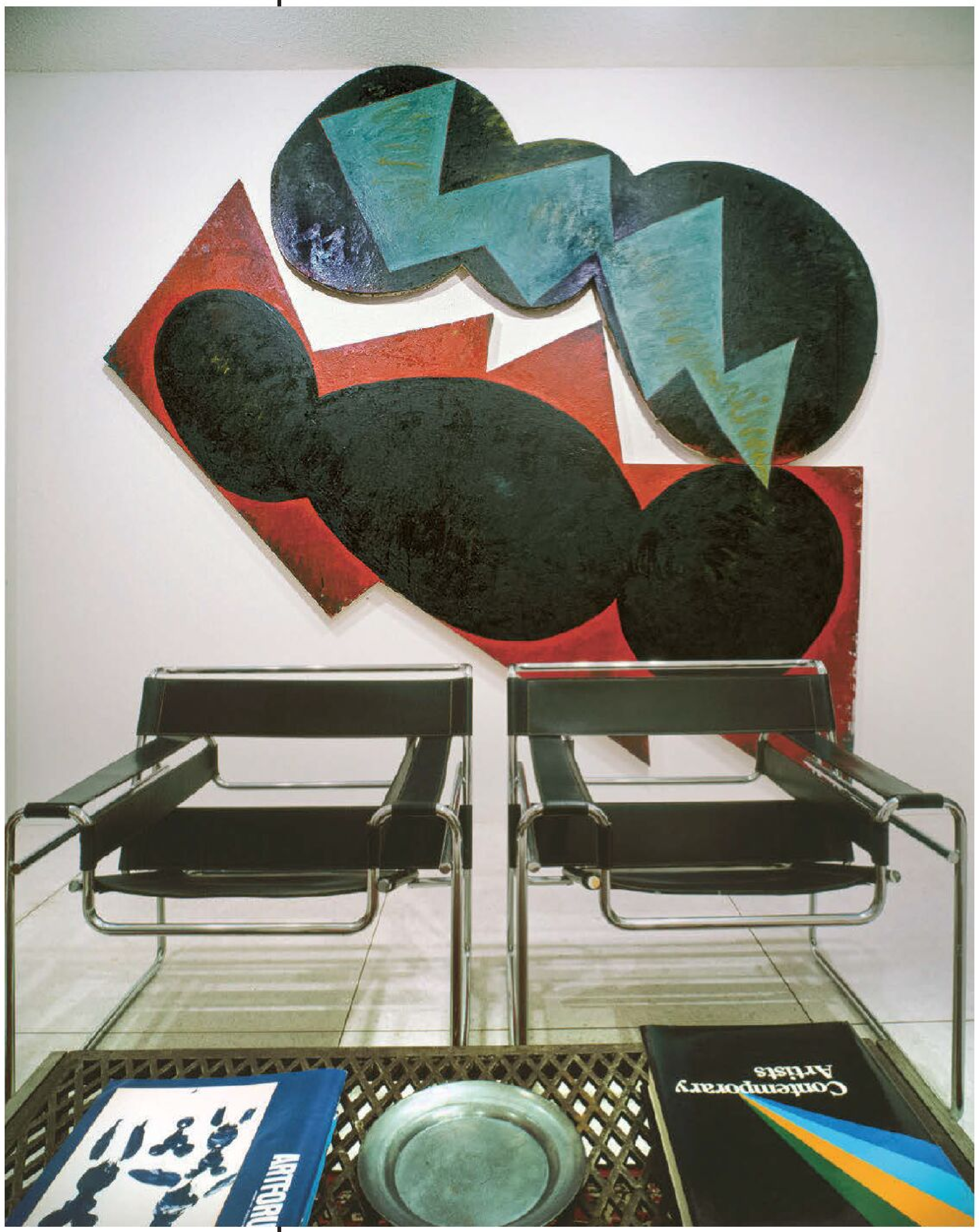
GALERIE GISELA CAPITAIN

THE ROOMS THEY HAD

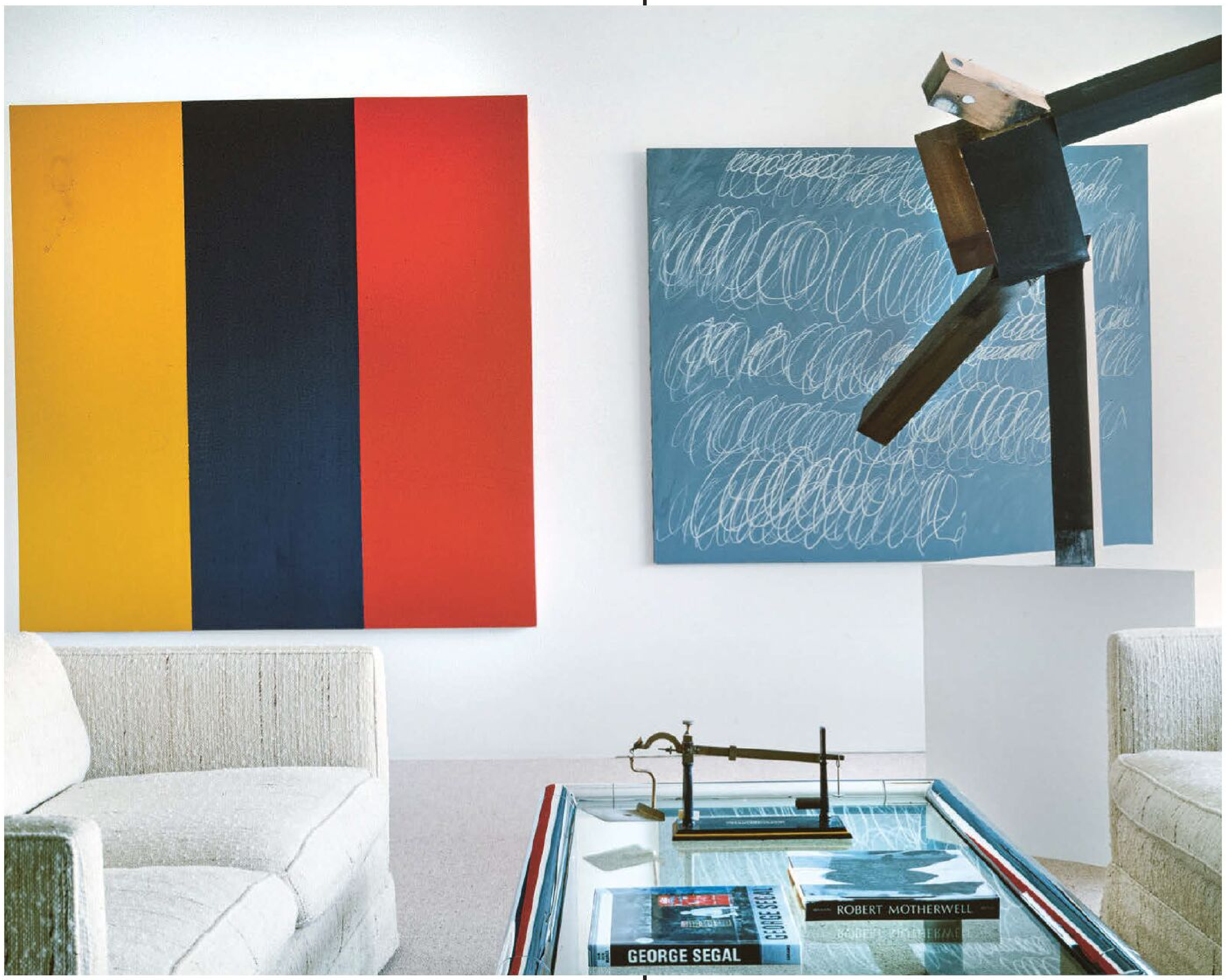


A Brice Marden in place of a city view, Carl Andre blocks rather than California grass, a Susan Rothenberg favored over a home office: in the minimal Hollywood Hills home of trailblazing all-out collector Barry Lowen, art always took pride of place

by
CLAES
JUHLIN

Art has taken over my life, in some ways," Barry Lowen, a television executive in his late 40s, declared in a 1982 issue of *Architectural Digest*. And any visitors to his low-slung house in the hills above Sunset Boulevard would have most likely agreed. Art occupied not only the collector's life but also his field of vision, literally. Wishing to live with as many paintings as possible, he had made the ultimate sacrifice of any elevated Angeleno: he gave up his view. Just as soon as he'd acquired the home, a few years prior to the magazine story, he'd started plastering over windows and blocking off sliding glass doors. All in all, he erased the commanding cityscape from a total of five rooms. What guests would enjoy instead was the sight of a stellar selection of contemporary art.

Elizabeth Murray's canvas *Heart and Mind* (1981) hangs on a temporary wall covering a window behind a pair of Marcel Breuer's Wassily chairs in the study



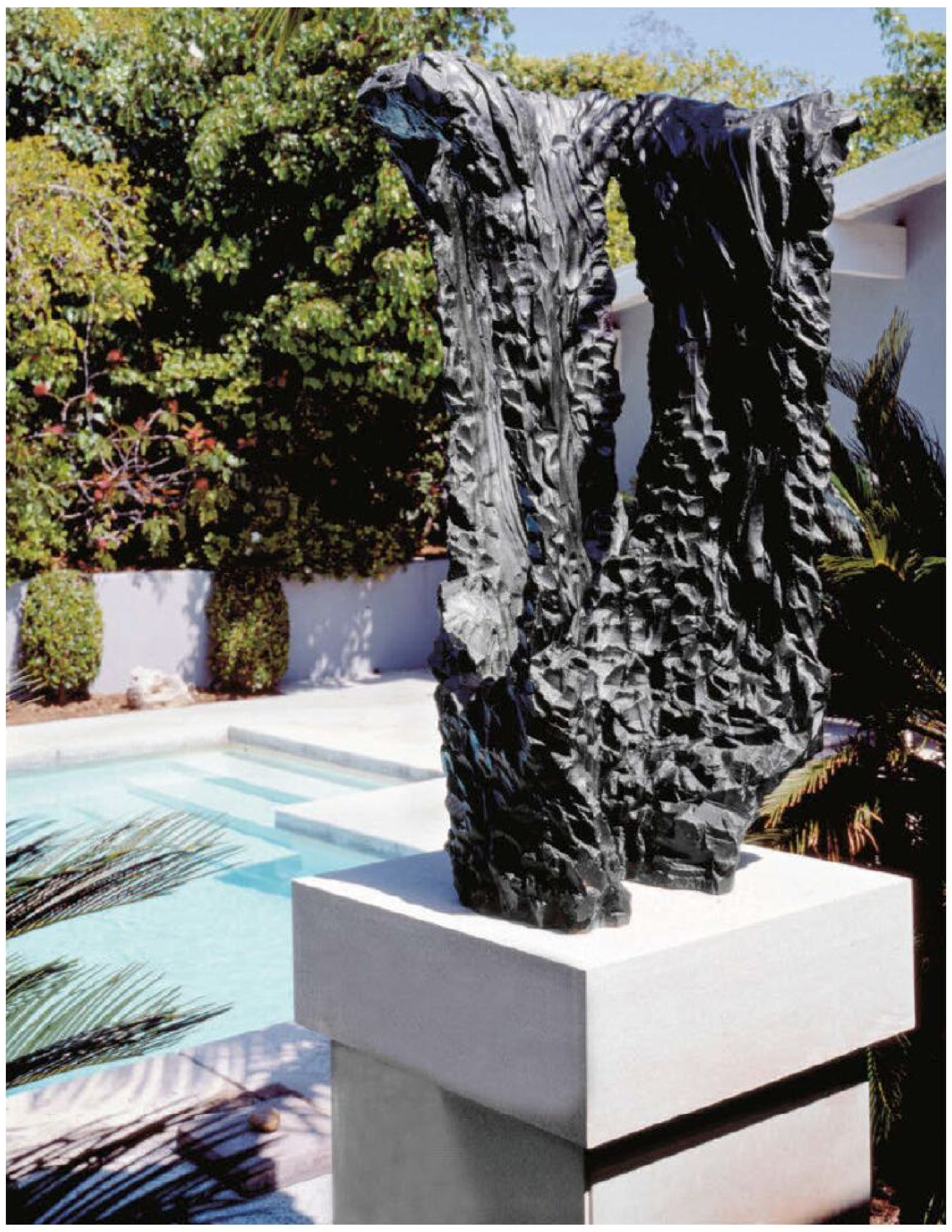
Joel Shapiro's poplar sculpture *Untitled* (1980–81) stands in front of Brice Marden's triptych *Red Yellow Blue II* (1974) and Cy Twombly's *Untitled* (1967) in the living room

Lowen began collecting in the early 1970s. Starting out with the acquisition of a kinetic sculpture by Takis, he would, without knowing it at the time, position this particular work as a sort of precursor to the minimal art he would assemble in depth in the coming decade. Focusing mainly on the art of his time, he carefully combined minimal abstract pieces by established contemporary artists with various neo-expressionist works by emerging painters, many of which were procured on regular and ritualized trips to New York. "The first day, the Upper East Side, the Madison Avenue galleries, and then down to 57th Street; the second day, the galleries in SoHo; and the last day is for museums and talking with dealers," Lowen explained. Once the new acquisitions were shipped to Los Angeles, the collector would carefully group them "so that they will complement one another, and individual rooms will make a coherent statement within the limitations of the space." In the living room, Lowen placed minimal works, a triptych by Brice Marden, a so-called blackboard painting by Cy Twombly, and a sculpture by Joel Shapiro. Dramatic large-scale pieces by Richard Serra and Frank Stella, along with a substantial Ellsworth Kelly, dominated the dining room. And while Lowen initially tried to keep the study as a home office, he eventually caved in, giving the space up to art. Here, yet another window was covered over and walls hung with powerful paintings by the likes of Susan Rothenberg, Jean-Michel Basquiat, and Elizabeth Murray. Even the garden got the same puristic makeover, with Lowen installing sculptures by Bryan Hunt and Carl Andre. As for the furniture, he kept it all modern and minimal: a dining table by Eero Saarinen, armchairs by Marcel Breuer, ottomans by Charles and Ray Eames—always placed at the heart of every room to fully optimize the wall space.

Throughout the early 1980s, Lowen became a tastemaker who would also act as a mentor for a new generation of major collectors, from CAA co-founder and investor Michael Ovitz to fellow television executive and producer Douglas Cramer. The latter, a colleague at Aaron Spelling Productions, would join Lowen on art-foraging trips, the two sometimes even vying for the same paintings, as described by Larry Gagosian in a 2012 interview: "Doug Cramer was a client very early on—Barry Lowen was also a great client—in fact, he and Doug were always in competition." Lowen would go on to contribute to the foundation of MOCA in Los Angeles, and he also headed a council supporting LACMA's art acquisitions. Fittingly, his art-engulfed Hollywood Hills home would double as a venue for cocktail parties and gatherings of friends, collectors, and artists alike.

In early 1985, Lowen was stricken with AIDS and passed away in September the same year. He bequeathed 68 important works to MOCA, forming the core of the museum's permanent collection, and his extensive library of art books was purchased by Ovitz, who today prominently displays them in his Beverly Hills home. Ovitz praised Lowen in a 1995 issue of *Vanity Fair*: "Barry was so far ahead of the curve. He was not a man of great financial means, but he built an extraordinary collection. He had a magnificent eye. An amazing man."

But maybe Douglas Cramer is the one who encapsulated Barry Lowen's unique dedication best, when, in the same article, he said, "When Lowen was dying, he told me that his only regret was that he never had a Lichtenstein."



Bryan Hunt's bronze *Masnad* (1980–81) rests on a limestone base by the pool in the courtyard

Eleanor Antin

A Retrospective
26.09.2025 – 08.02.2026
Mudam Luxembourg

MUDAM
The Contemporary Art Museum of Luxembourg

Media partner: Le Monde

Eleanor Antin, *Representational Painting (Short Version)*, 1971 (detail)
Courtesy of the artist, Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York
and Richard Saltoun Gallery, London, Rome and New York

Fire Island Satyricon

Having fallen asleep countless times to Fellini's gloriously gay but almost unwatchable film, *Jarrett Earnest* just recently rediscovered the first-century CE blueprint. Can he adapt the script for the very now, he wonders, while roaming the dunes and dungeons of his favorite holiday haunt

The boys are on the run, from what we don't totally know—fleeing fate or pursuing fantasy. Encolpius is crazy in love with his twink boyfriend, Giton, and so is his best friend, Ascyltus, as well as everyone else they encounter. All are enamored with G's beauty—just *desperate* to fuck him. For their parts, E and A are also incredibly hot, as far as we can tell. G luxuriates in this sea of attention, is always being carried off by it as if by the tides. E chases him through bathhouses, brothels, across the Mediterranean, as G runs off with A, or vice versa. Anguished laments, rapturous reunions, curses, disguises, mock-suicides, banquets, erotic hijinks: a kaleidoscopic satire of Roman life.

Satyricon comes to us as a shattered ruin of a novel from the first century CE, yet even in fragments it dazzles. It is a book under the sign of a giant dick. The perma-erect god Priapus impacts the plot at key points, but the name of the story's protagonist, Encolpius, also means "the crotch," a hero with a cock of gold. E is driven by the purity of his lust, in contrast to the more devious A, who nonetheless has a bigger dick: when A's clothes are stolen in the baths, he walks naked shouting for G, and the crowd marvels at "a pecker of such extraordinary length that you would have thought the man was appended to the pecker rather than the pecker to the man." He, A, is soon picked up by some rich Roman, supplied with fancy new clothes and a ton of money, which he uses to offer a reward for finding G, his "runaway slave." The person relaying the story concludes, "It shows you how much more it means in this world to have a great tool than a grand talent."

We know very little about this very early novel—its original length or scope, for example. The book was so filthy that much (perhaps the majority?) of it was censored and lost in the relay of scribes across subsequent ages. Thus we have episodes and vignettes *in medias res* of varying lengths, sometimes just a few lines, so that the reader fills in a lot of blanks. What remains is so vivid that it's easy to do, and the fragmentation weirdly adds to its startling modernity. Similarly, all that we know about its author, Petronius, stems from

The book *Satyricon* was so filthy that much (perhaps the majority?) of it was censored and lost in the relay of scribes across subsequent ages

Opening spread:
La Schiavetta (Hylette Adolphe), Encolpius (Martin Potter), and Ascyltus (Hiram Keller) in *Fellini Satyricon*, 1969

Giton (Max Born) and Vernacchio (Fanfulla) in *Fellini Satyricon*, 1969

a page of Tacitus that explains his position in the court of the aesthete-tyrant Nero as the official "arbiter of elegance"—more or less my dream job. Within this vast historical absence, the bits of text open like a hologram.

A striking recurrence in world religious literature: the persistent construct that, at any point in a timeline that spans millenia, the writer's present is conceived as a "fallen world"; there was some better, earlier time, some purer moment from which we have been banished and toward which we seek divine reconciliation. The glory of *Satyricon*, written at the very heights of Imperial Rome, in the thick of the Pax Romana, is to see that degeneracy as a fact of contemporary life to be enjoyed. *Satyricon* ironizes this belatedness over and again. In a gallery of painting, our protagonist asks the (bad) poet Eumolpus "how he accounted for the decadence of our own times and how it had happened that the fine arts had withered and painting had vanished almost without a trace." "It was the love of money," the poet laments, "that began our catastrophic decline." Later, discussing the pathetic state of poetry, he explains that poets have abandoned form and tight internal structure, opting for cliché, cheap language, and vulgarity. Which on the one hand all sounds true, then as now, but on the other hand is announced within a book built on all kinds of colloquial language and colorful vulgarity, itself an original literary achievement.

Which is to say that *Satyricon* feels made for our moment, a condemnation or liberation, depending on your perspective, or indeed showing the two to be inextricable. Certainly, the great Federico Fellini tried to exploit this point with his loose 1969 film adaptation, striving to envision a truly pagan reality. *Fellini Satyricon* is an incredibly strange thing: visually riveting and immensely boring. This unusual tension seems to have been in part intentional. Fellini described trying to create an alien vision of the past that refused the clichés of cinematic epics set in ancient Rome. Contending that its inhabitants existed within a psychic, spiritual, and erotic world unknowable to the present, his techniques to produce alienation—"bad" acting mostly by non-actors, slippery dubbing that doesn't match the mouths moving—prevents emotional identification with the characters. Instead, Fellini told Alberto Moravia, he was after "a documentary of a dream," and harnessed the full force of his team of artists to create the most complex and arresting sets, make-up, costumes, lighting, each one more stunningly imaginative than the next. The effect is a two-hour sequence of images. We cut between them with big shifts of continuity and background, replicating the fragments of text, but also enacting a technicolor hallucination, a film as much about outer space as ancient Rome.

It opens with the gorgeous suntanned Martin Potter as Encolpius, with golden curls and a tiny tan tunic that hits just below his crotch, standing in front of a large graffitied wall that looks like a Cy Twombly painting. He's shouting about the betrayal by both his friend and boyfriend in a monologue more or less taken straight from the ancient text:

> And what can be said of Giton? That one… on the day he reached manhood, assumed womanhood instead… That one… his mother had already convinced him not to be a man. A boy who played the whore in a prison; a boy who betrays the memory of an old friendship; what shame, shame! Like a woman in heat, he sells himself for the space of one night. And now they lie locked in each other's arms for long nights without end … they must laugh at me, left out in the cold, alone!

Then American heartthrob Hiram Keller as Ascyltus slinks in like a panther, oiled, dripping, wearing a thong, and the two wrestle over the whereabouts of Giton. Needless to say: it's very sexy. As a premise for a movie—watching these two guys running around fucking and fighting—what more could you ask for? I have fallen asleep to *Fellini Satyricon* many times since I was a teenager, when I bought a deaccessioned VHS copy from the local Blockbuster, around the same time I tried translating the sleaziest bits from Latin in high school. Often I've awakened to glimpse random scenes, entering its artistic wet dream: an artist with complete creative freedom, making something so driven by his own unconscious that it's almost completely depersonalized, so visually rich it's nearly unwatchable. These days I play it with the sound off, putting on music and letting it unspool in the background like a moving painting.

As a premise for a movie—watching these guys running around fucking and fighting—what more could you ask for?

Scenes from *Satyricon*, the book and the film, have re-emerged in flashes from my own unconscious while spending summers in the Fire Island Pines, the idyllic, secluded queer paradise on a barrier island about an hour's drive from New York City. It's a backdrop of elegant modernist beach houses, connected through boardwalks with overgrown sea-grasses. Deers meander. Almost 90 percent of the visitors have the lean, ripped bodies of E and A, like ancient sculptures, walking around in speedos or naked, dancing, fucking. Those who are not incredibly beautiful, the old and infirm, have secured their place there with extreme wealth or celebrity. It produces a slightly toxic atmosphere around privilege and masculinity, around economics and erotics. For a long time I've wanted to write an adaptation of *Satyricon* set on the island, following our lovable horndogs, E and A and G, around the weekly underwear party at the Ice Palace in Cherry Grove, amid the drag queens "invading" the Pines by boat on the Fourth of July, navigating an orgy at a famous architect's house, enduring a tediously luxurious dinner hosted by a rich finance guy that the assembled (broke) hunks fawningly tolerate.

One scene from the book I'd place right in a Horace Gifford beach house. E has made it home drunk, lying in bed alone in a guest room, thinking about the daddy he saw seducing G. He tries to calm his jealousy with an *Ethical-Slut*-style monologue that plays out endlessly among fags in open or polyamorous relationships:

> [The man] finds the boy attractive, and you are irked. Can this be right? Look about you, man. Why, aren't the good things of this world made for our common enjoyment, every lovely thing free for the taking? The sun shines down upon us all; the moon with her train of countless stars leads all animals alike to their common pasture. What is lovelier than water? Yet it flows for us all. Is love therefore exempt from the universal law, a bliss to be stolen and hid, and not our common reward? No, no, better to have nothing at all, unless the world envies you what you have. Besides, what do you have to fear from one rival, and an old one at that?

But he's not convinced and proceeds to work himself up into a furious cuckolding fantasia—the engine that keeps driving the story. At a certain point, the worst thing imaginable happens to E: he can no longer get an erection. (He has offended the god Priapus by witnessing a sacred rite and is punished by a retribution orgy.) His soft dick is bemoaned in epic terms: "I no longer recognize myself at all. That part of my body with which I once was an Achilles is dead and buried." He is taunted and humiliated by a lover he cannot satisfy. He seeks out a sorceress to cure him—in the process compounding his offense by killing a vicious goose sacred to Priapus—all to no avail. What is he to do?

In my Fire Island version, through a series of slapstick misrecognitions, E, in his diminished condition, enters the Mr. Nude Belvedere contest on Labor Day weekend. This is a yearly rite, held at the rotting, Italianate-rococo, clothing-optional "gay resort for men" called The Belvedere (named for a fiberglass copy of the Apollo Belvedere overlooking the pool), within a cavernous central room covered with mirrors, murals, and filigree. In the first round, the entrants are introduced to the audience in towels. The towels come off in the next round for an "erotic dance" number. Lastly, the contestants go into the audience to be orally fluffed before comparing their hard-ons for all to judge. A and G are watching, and throughout, E's terror mounts. Suddenly, while dancing, by some divine intervention (unclear in the text also; some god greater than Priapus has intervened), E feels his potency returning, right in front of G: "With that, I lifted my tunic and displayed myself in my erected glory. Gaping with astonishment and awe, utterly incapable of believing his eyes, he reached out his shaking hand and caressed that huge pledge of heaven's favor."

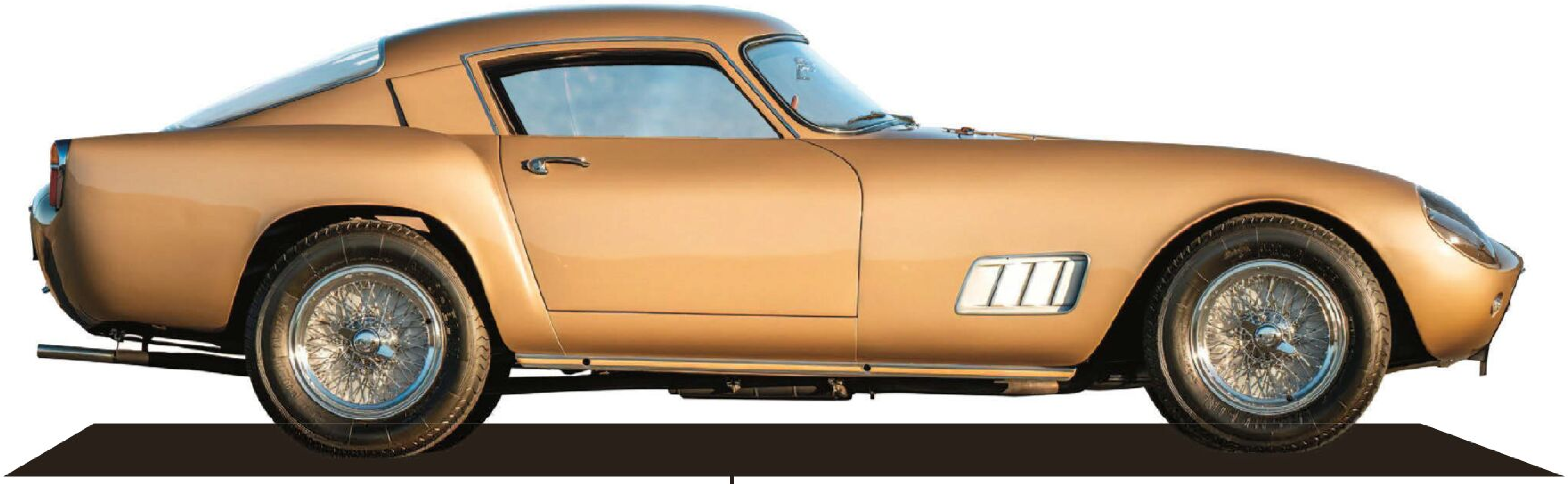
Fellini's film ends with a close-up of golden Encolpius, backlit by a blazing white expanse, his line of heroic speech breaking off abruptly in the middle like the fragment of text. It cross-fades into an encaustic painting of him in the style of a Pompeian fresco. The camera pulls back, revealing similar portraits of other characters from the film, then further to reveal the paintings on the ruins of broken walls, set against the empty landscape, the eternal mirror of sky and sea.

Ascyltus (Hiram Keller)
in *Fellini Satyricon*, 1969

Fastest Sculptures in the World

FERRARI 250 GT

“Tour de France”



by
ULF POSCHARDT

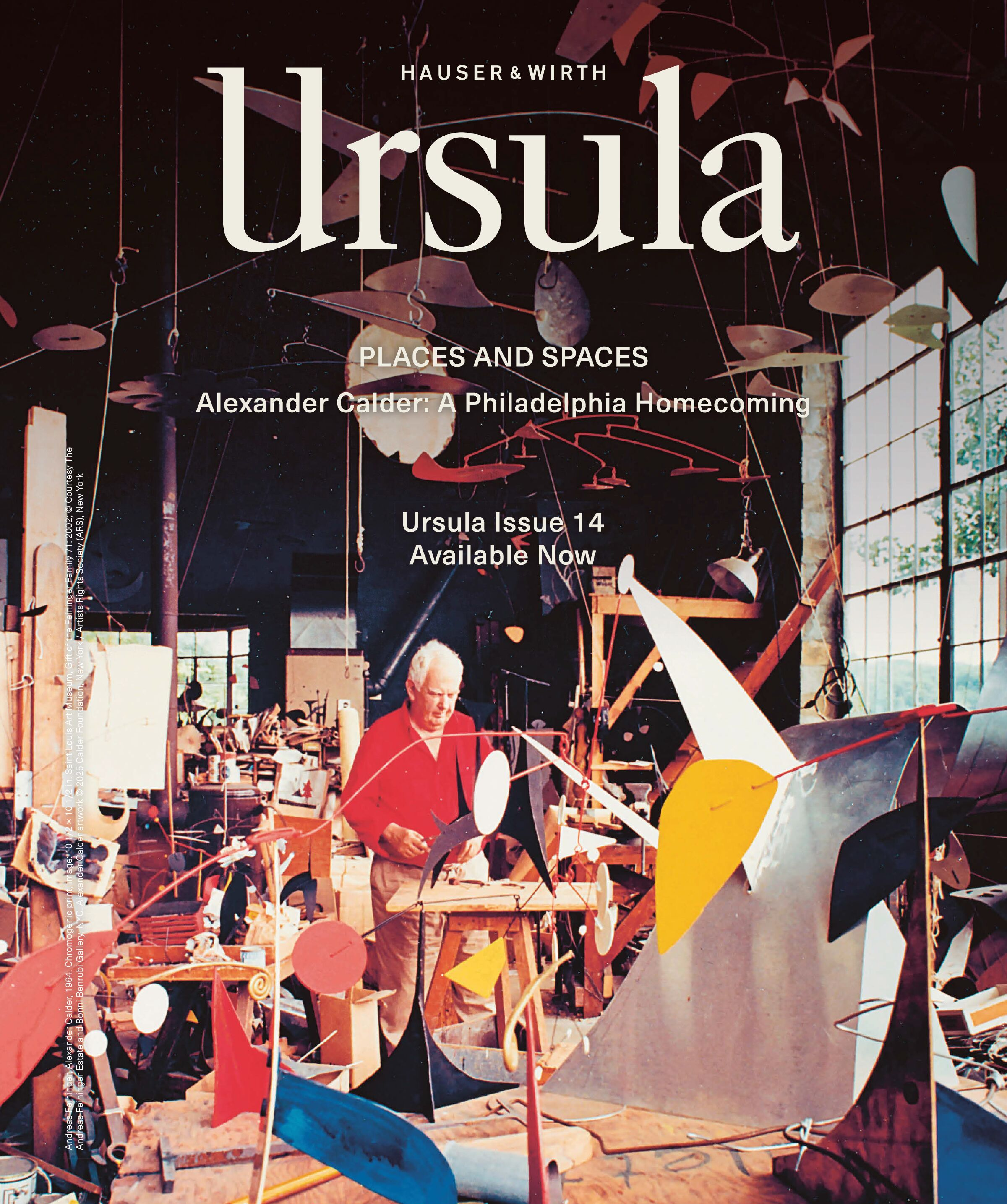
One of the biggest myths about fetishized sports cars—particularly those fast and exclusive and *dangerous* creations from Maranello—is that they’re just toys for boys. Those fragile, old yet effervescent Ferraris with their unsynchronized gearboxes, hard suspension, and lousy brakes are, in particular, considered status symbols reserved for men with balls of steel. But as with Porsche, for Ferrari, this story is only half true: from the beginning, it was precisely liberated, modern women who sought out—and *found*—their automotive challenge in these sleek Italian projectiles.

Norma Shearer (1902–1983), the American Oscar-winner who converted to Judaism for MGM producer Irving Thalberg, drove a Ferrari 250 GT “Tour de France.” This early Ferrari, designed for endurance racing, was usually only entrusted to the strong hands of well-trained athletes. And watching Shearer on the silver screen—her small wrists, elegant appearance, quick-witted eyes—one can hardly imagine her climbing behind the wheel of that incredibly fast 12-cylinder on a regular basis. But such women were Enzo Ferrari’s favorite customers. In his memoirs, he reserves the most loving details for them.

Shearer was known for taking on confident, progressive roles that were considered particularly daring at the time. Her legacy lies in her embodiment of characters who combined grace, intelligence, and independence. She retired from the movie business in the mid-1940s—following Thalberg’s early death in 1936—and went out in her Ferrari, thus becoming a role model for the still-small group of female *Ferrariste*. She was a quiet revolutionary. “The morals of yesterday are no more,” she noted. “They are as dead as the day they were lived. Economic independence has put woman on exactly the same footing as man.”

Only 77 of Shearer’s favorite car were built, between 1956 and 1959. The Ferrari 250 GT “Tour de France” got its nickname after three consecutive victories in the Tour de France Automobile, a long-distance race held, almost annually, between 1899 and 1986. Designed by Gioacchino Colombo, its 3.0-liter V12 engine delivers about 240 to 260 horsepower, depending on the version. The chassis came mainly from Scaglietti, some of them with those characteristic air-intake vents (or louvers) on the rear fenders, which changed over the years. Not merely a successful race car, the 250 TdF was, stylistically, the definitive combination of sporty functionality and refined lines—the link between those early Ferrari 250 models and later icons such as the 250 GT SWB and the 250 GTO.

In the 1950s automotive world, it was the bravest accessory an emancipated woman could drive. How could we have forgotten Norma Shearer?



HAUSER & WIRTH

Ursula

PLACES AND SPACES

Alexander Calder: A Philadelphia Homecoming

Ursula Issue 14
Available Now

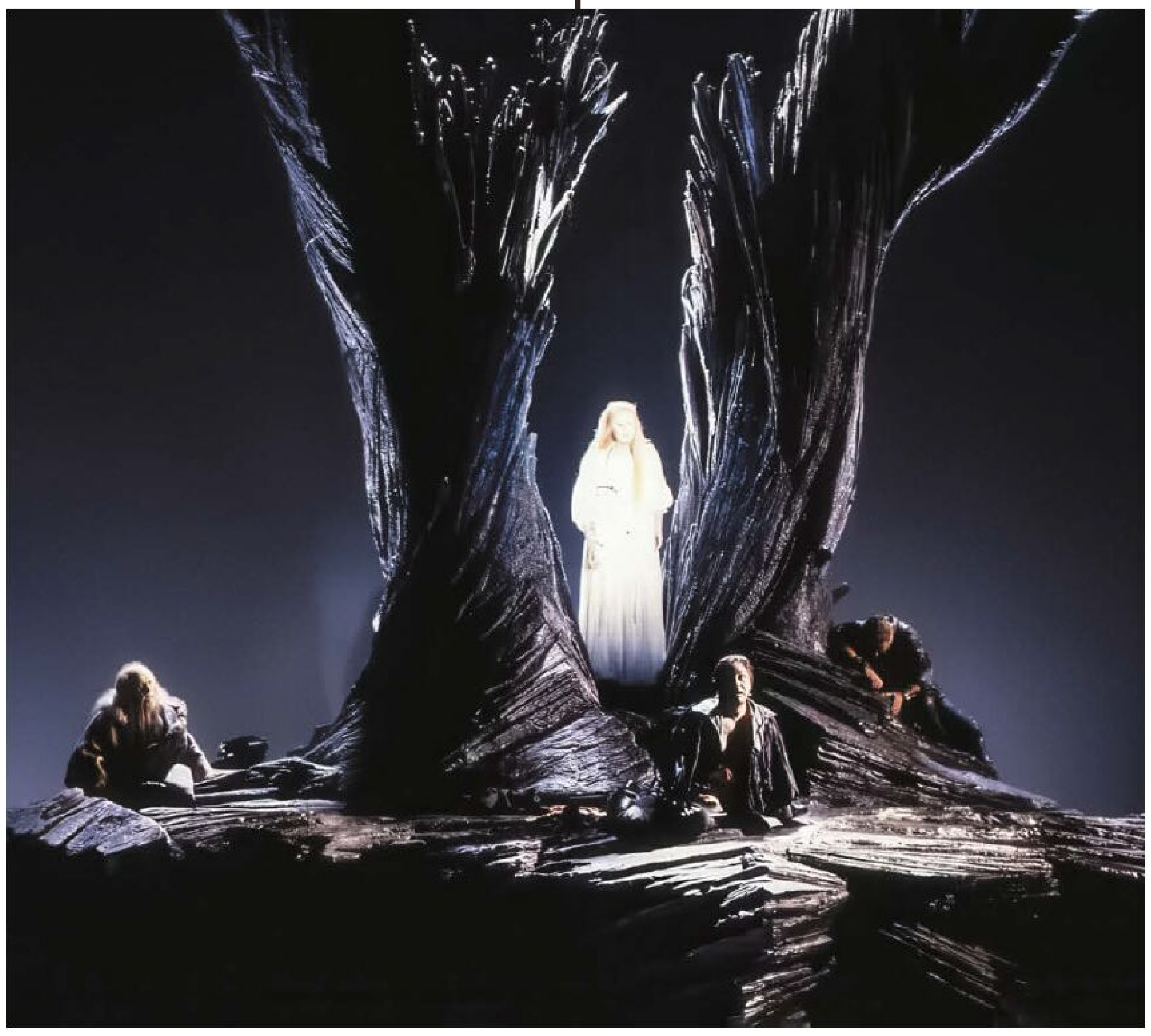
Andreas Feininger, Alexander Calder, 1964. Chromogenic print, image: 10 1/2 × 10 1/2 in. Saint Louis Art Museum, Gift of the Feininger Family 71: 2002; © Courtesy The Andreas Feininger Estate and Bonni Benrubi Gallery, NYC. Alexander Calder artwork © 2025 Calder Foundation, New York / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Coup de Foudre

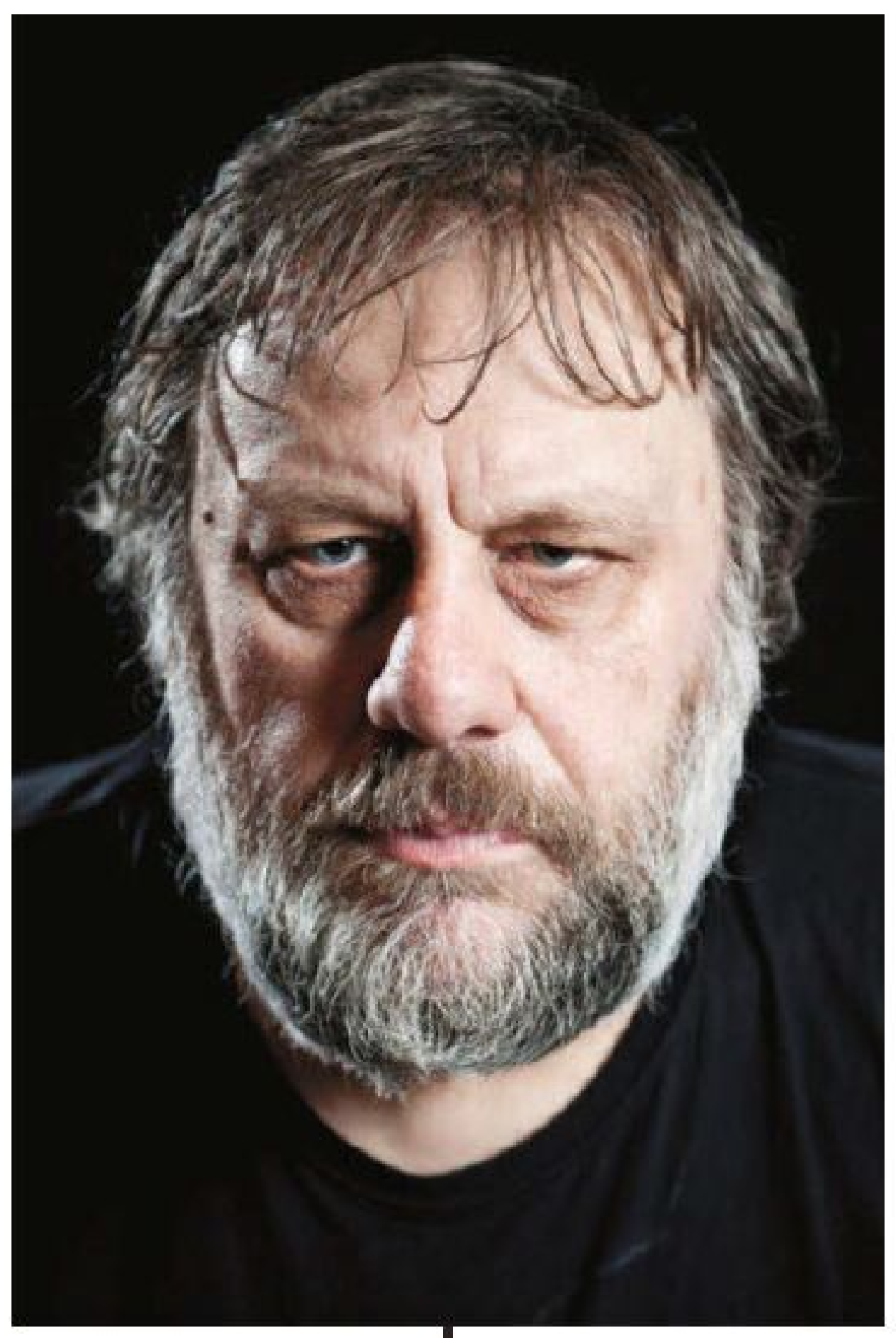
“TRISTAN DIES ALONE”

by SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

Great art can hit you like a flash. Slavoj Žižek on how Jean-Pierre Ponnelle’s *Tristan und Isolde* took a risk, shattering him profoundly



JEAN-PIERRE PONNELLE
Tristan und Isolde, 1983

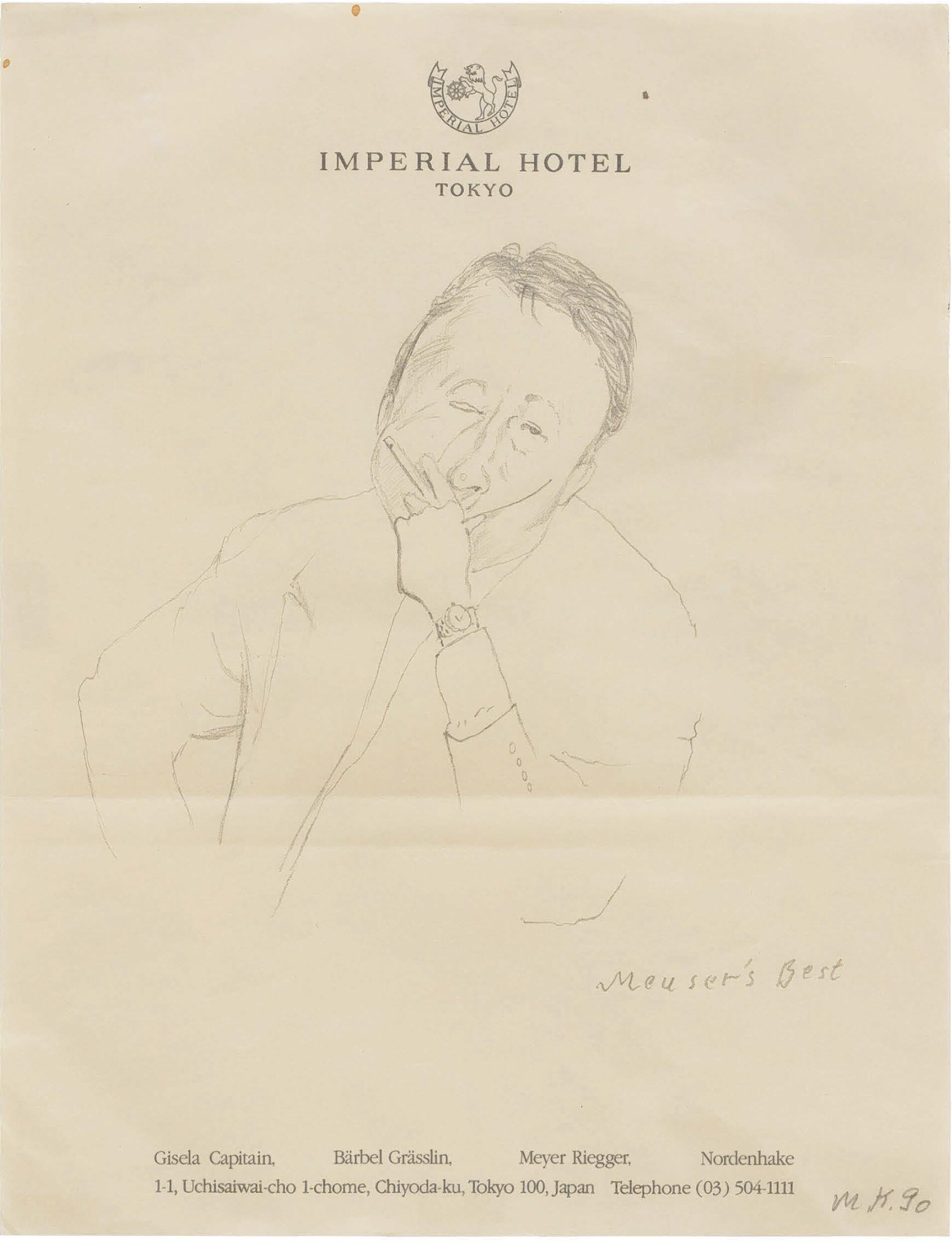


The art event that shattered me personally and deeply affected my entire inner life is the definitive staging of Richard Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*: Jean-Pierre Ponnelle’s Bayreuth version, conducted by Daniel Barenboim in 1981 and filmed in 1983. Classically, *Tristan* is the very opera that elevates the shared death of lovers into its explicit ideological goal—this is, precisely, *not* what happens in Ponnelle’s iteration. Here, Tristan dies alone: Isolde has remained with her husband, King Marke, and her appearance in Act III is merely the dying Tristan’s hallucination.

Tristan and Isolde approach this moment in the duet at the close of Act II—“So Stürben Wir, um Ungetrennt” (So We Are Dying, Undivided). But their orgasmic self-annihilation is cut short, first by the warning of Brangäne, then by the brutal intrusion of Marke. At the opera’s end, Tristan dies alone, immersed in his/her own solipsistic dream. It is along these lines that one should read Isolde’s ecstatic death as the ultimate operatic prosopopoeia: Tristan can only die if his death is transposed onto Isolde. In other words, what “really happens” in Act III is *only Tristan*’s long “voyage to the bottom of the night,” with regard to which Isolde’s death is a phantasmatic supplement, the delirious construction that enables Tristan to die in peace. All of Act III, inclusive of the ending, is thus Tristan’s monologue.

In the opera’s final moments, when Isolde stops singing her “Liebestod,” the stage is enveloped in darkness for a couple of seconds. Then a much weaker, grayish light returns, showing Tristan dying alone under a gigantic dead tree—the most desperate moment in art that I know. Isolde does not appear to her lover here; she appears as an extra-bright phantasm *behind his back*. Tristan looks at us, the spectators, as if he sees Isolde in our gaze. As in hardcore porn, we are here reduced to a pure gaze, and the pivot is woman’s enjoyment—Isolde’s ecstatic death—which has been staged for the male gaze, but in a more complex way: a man (Tristan) sees the gaze seeing a woman (Isolde) dying.

Today, there are many attempts to stage classical opera by not only transposing the action into a different, most-often contemporary era, but also changing some basic facts of the narrative itself. There is no a priori criterion that would allow us to judge the success or failure of such changes. Each of these interventions is a risky act that must be judged by its own immanent standards. These kinds of experiments often ridiculously misfire—however, *not always*—and there is no way to tell in advance, one has to take the risk. One thing is sure: the only way to be faithful to a classic work is to take such a risk—avoiding it, sticking to the traditional letter, is the safest way to betray the spirit of the classic. In other words, the only way to keep a classical work alive is to treat it as “open,” pointing toward the future, or, to use the metaphor evoked by Walter Benjamin, acting as if the classic work is a film for which the appropriate chemical developer was invented later on, so that it is only today that we are able to get the full picture. This is what Ponnelle did with *Tristan und Isolde*.



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M.K.90

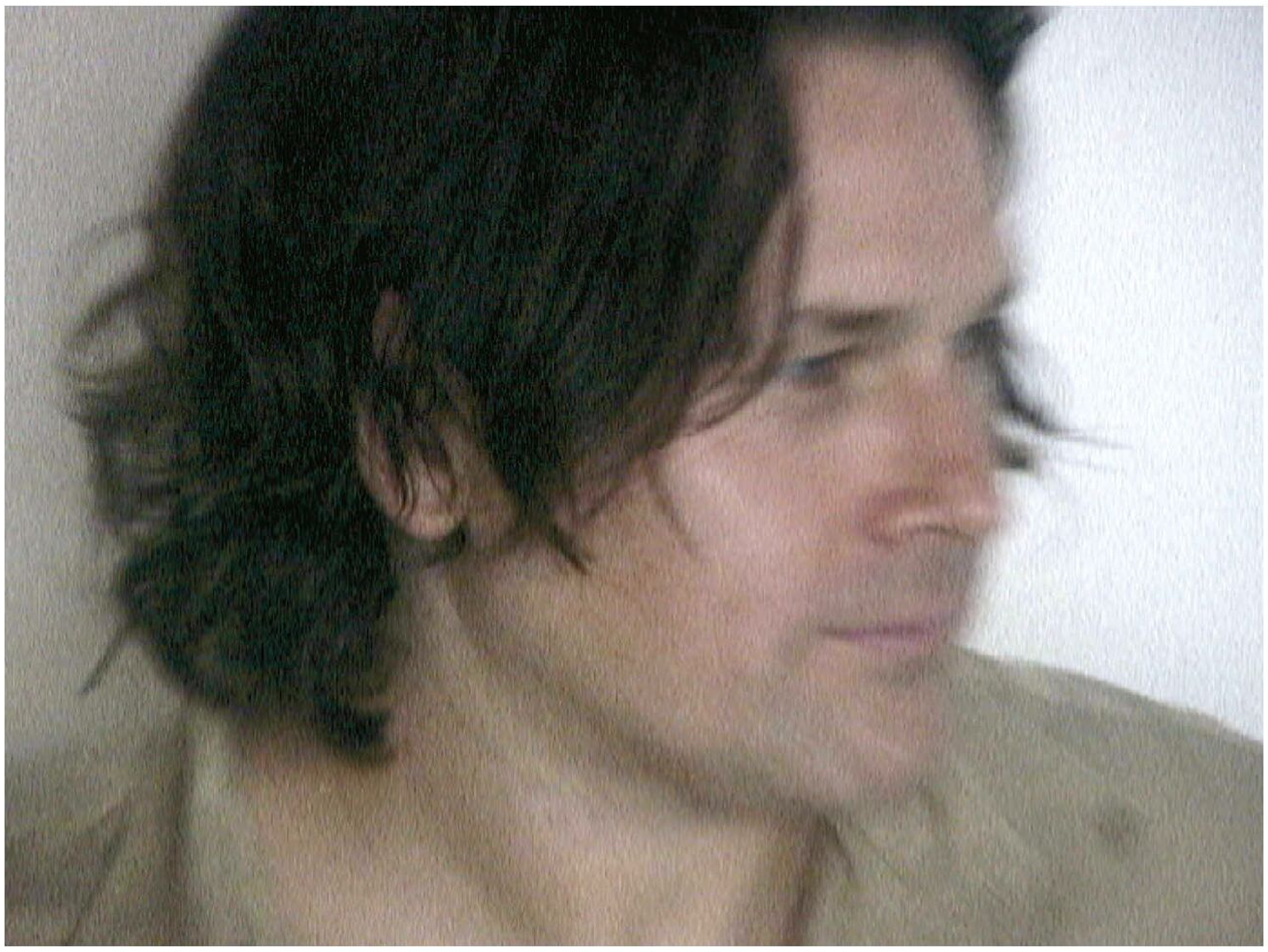
THEY DESERVE OUR LOVE

Once a striving screenwriter for children's television, GRANT FALARDEAU is now turning heads as a sculptor. His enigmatic characters make us feel what it means to be human, writes *Andrew Winer*

That a highly idiosyncratic, recondite, and even hermetic body of work can have broad appeal is almost a shibboleth of contemporary art. I'm glad this is the way things stand. I'm all for it. Weirdness is important and needs to be loved. And I can't think of another world that is as hungry for it as the art world. But *why*? What's the draw? I reckon it must be that those who are attracted to art, really attracted to it, carry a voyeuristic streak. I'm not referring to the male gaze, but rather to an *interestedness* in another person's pains, desires, fixations, compulsions, obsessions, or addictions—the things, however sublimated or suppressed, behind nearly every work of art. In idiosyncratic work, those things—the artist's issues—tend to be *barely* suppressed, and in some cases barely sublimated, thus drawing people's attention to the artist themselves.

But there's room for everything in the art world, including a very different kind of art-making that appeals not to people's interest in one particular person's issues but rather in *everyone's*. Unlike their more hermetic peers, creators of such work often seem to be instruments of what Carl Jung called the collective unconscious. They have little use for identity, certainly not their own, and more likely it is an emptying out of the self, or a plain disregard for it, that counts among their primary orders of business before they get down to their actual task, which is—wait for it—nothing less than to take the measure of what it feels like to be us, and, through the transformative medium of their particular art, to make it public. "Instrument," "collective," "emptying of self," "us," "public"—you might think that the individuality of anyone beholding this second sort of work I'm now describing stands to be

DEVOS, 2024
Ceramic, pastel, 41 × 39 × 36 cm



smothered by its emanations of the universal. In fact it stands to be addressed. The pleasures and problems of human existence are unquestionably shared by the plurality, but they are still experienced by one. By this one, by that one, by *every*one. Every artist is one of those ones. And when they are *this* kind of artist, they are bestowed with the burden and, sometimes, the pleasure of somehow packing a sense of the wider miscellaneousness of experience—symphonic, common, shared by the multitudes—into a single object. Grant Falardeau, 40-ish, LA-based, still largely unknown, is this kind of artist. And his seeming ability to say *something* about everyone's individual experience may just about signal the emergence of a future major artist. If true, then, charmingly, he's a major artist-in-the-making who, as I discovered while visiting his studio one hot morning this past August, doesn't know it yet.

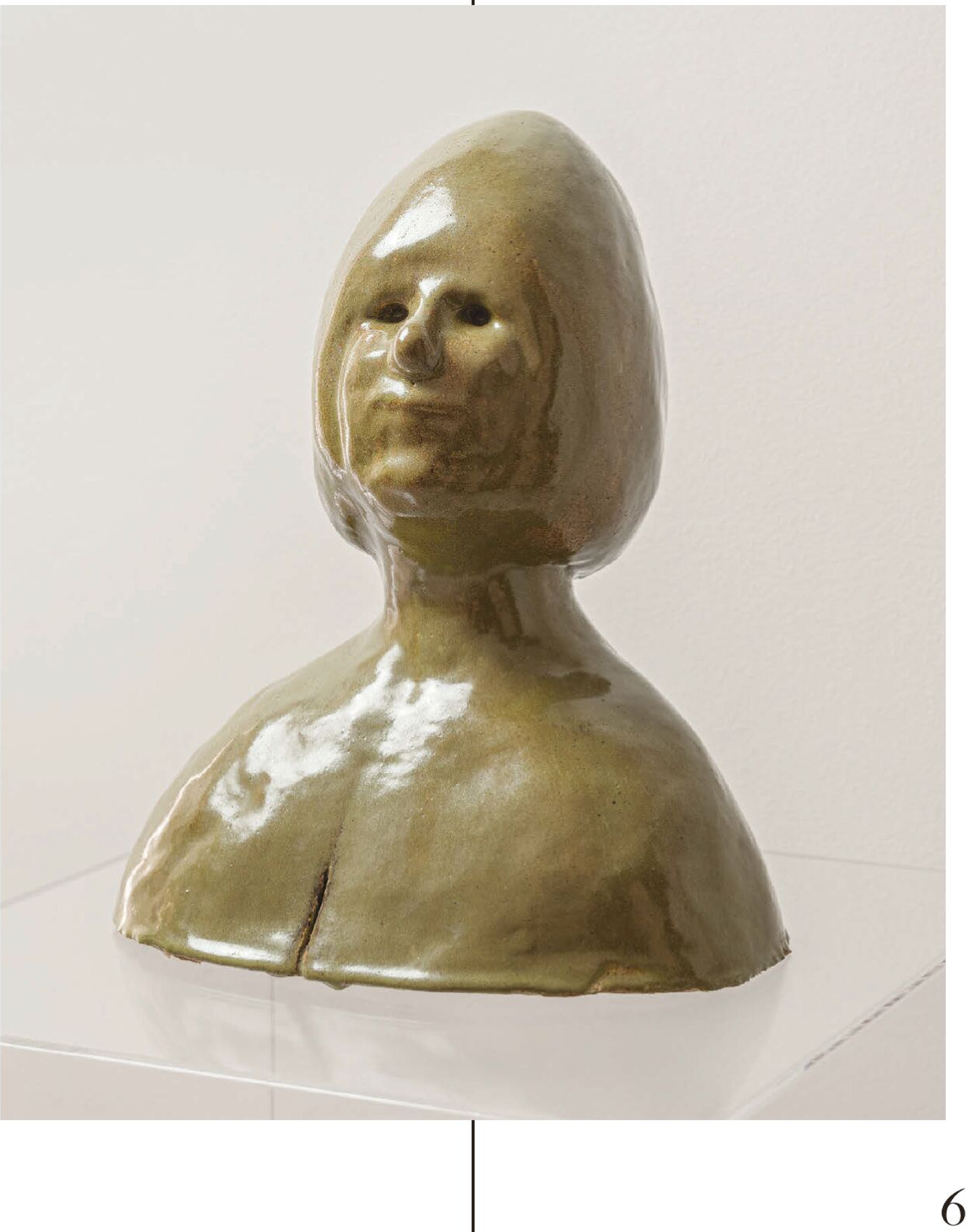
The everyman sensibilities in Falardeau's work can be traced, I think, to his first career writing and creating characters for various Nickelodeon animated series. Then about a decade ago he started making clay busts and heads, after enrolling in a ceramics course with his Hollywood bon-vivant cousin at a nearby community center, where the two of them stood out, he tells me, among the other students, a group of "adorable grandmas." In due time he found his footing in the medium, mastering techniques such as building pipe armatures, leaving access holes (that allow him to push his faces and heads out with one hand while pressing in with the other), and managing the clay's thickness and heaviness to avoid cracking and collapsing. Still, with a form as overdone as ceramic busts, none of this necessarily helps someone avoid cliché and kitsch, and other cultural and aesthetic pitfalls that are a ubiquitous feature of high-school and amateur pottery classes the nation over. Why even try? In Falardeau's case, a wish to transfer to clay some of what he'd learned about narrative from television writing (and from passionately studying the vintage mechanical figures in the original 1960s Disneyland theme ride, Pirates of the Caribbean), as well as an instinct for artistic mischievousness and even rebellion, were all that he needed to jump right in. To hear him tell it, he's still jumping into it, sometimes from the deep end.

"This is the most difficult kind of work to make well, because it's so played out," he told me as we surveyed a series of recent busts—Falardeau calls them *characters*, significantly and unsurprisingly—that were ranged on a shelf along one wall, still waiting to be fired. "That's the challenge. It's like putting yourself in a corner. Which I think is a good thing to do as an artist—corner yourself. I am not excited every time I do a sculpture. It's a tightrope I feel I'm walking." He points to one of the mottled brown pieces, a slightly cherubic, androgynous head that, like the others, hints of antiquity but belongs to no particular epoch, has no particular age. If there is a sculptural equivalent of those uncanny round faces in Dana Schutz's recent work, these might qualify. Is that a man's wig or a woman's mantle of hair? Scratched, dented, pressed, and worn, the head's face remains placid and immovable, all mineral content and no other content—it isn't telling. "I have drawn that character a hundred times in the last two days," Falardeau continues, sighing but with lit-up eyes. "You have to think about the entire world they're in. Your philosophy has to come out. What is this? What the hell are you trying to do with every single face? How far do you want to go? It's rough. I feel like it is the most vulnerable thing. It's putting yourself right in the line of fire."

> "Your philosophy has to come out. What is this? What the hell are you trying to do with every single face?"

Left: GRANT FALARDEAU photographed in his studio in Los Angeles by MONI HAWORTH for BLAU International

This is healthy fear and anxiety, if you're an artist, and part of what guides Falardeau toward achieving in his work that shocking thing: presence. There's nothing more dispiriting than entering a gallery or museum and walking past a sculpture that doesn't have it; the saddest of all objects, the sum of whose parts does not exceed its dumb materiality. To be in a room of Falardeaus is to feel, among other things, relieved. And enlivened. But *where* do these faces come from? If anything is adding presence to these pieces, it's the faces. As the two of us stand there, they seem to carve a quiet out of the room; they make me want to be silent, slow down, really look. After a pause,



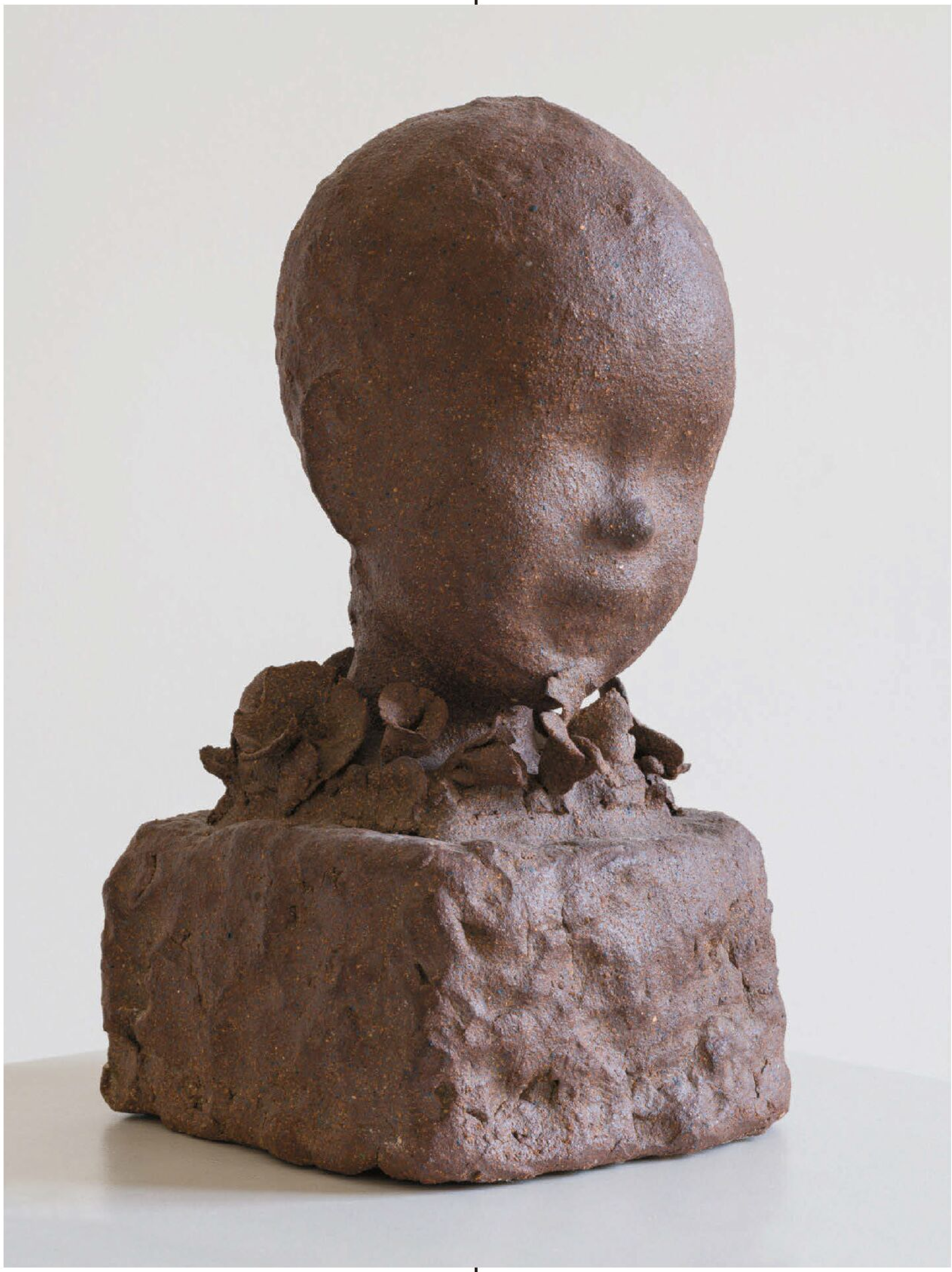
CARA, 2021
Ceramic, glaze, 39 × 29 × 18 cm

> Falardeau confirms what I already suspected: he does not work from live models, nor from photographs, but from the imagined narratives that give birth to his sculptures

Falardeau confirms what I already suspected: he does not work from live models, nor from photographs, but from the imagined narratives that give birth to his characters.

With characters in any form of narration, at least the *main* characters, access to interiority is usually granted through either first or close-third points of view, and it strikes me as nearly impossible to only look *at* a Falardeau; you also feel *with* it. Yes, the settings and situations and props belonging to the imagined narrative surrounding each character have been removed, but it's a subtraction that is entirely to the work's benefit—a deracination of his characters that is responsible, I wager, for a bit of a feeling of soul, or of what you might call the spirit-world, that clings lightly to these pieces. In an essay on Rembrandt, John Berger writes of the deadening effect, for the painter of a portrait, of looking for what's in the sitter's face. But if the sitter leaves, the artist paints what's left behind, and that, Berger claims, is when things come alive. This is precisely the place where Falardeau begins—except there was never a sitter.

GRANT FALARDEAU in his studio yard in Los Angeles, photographed by MONI HAWORTH for BLAU International



“There are no rules. I want to get the faces worn down to the point where you can’t tell, exactly, what they’re feeling”

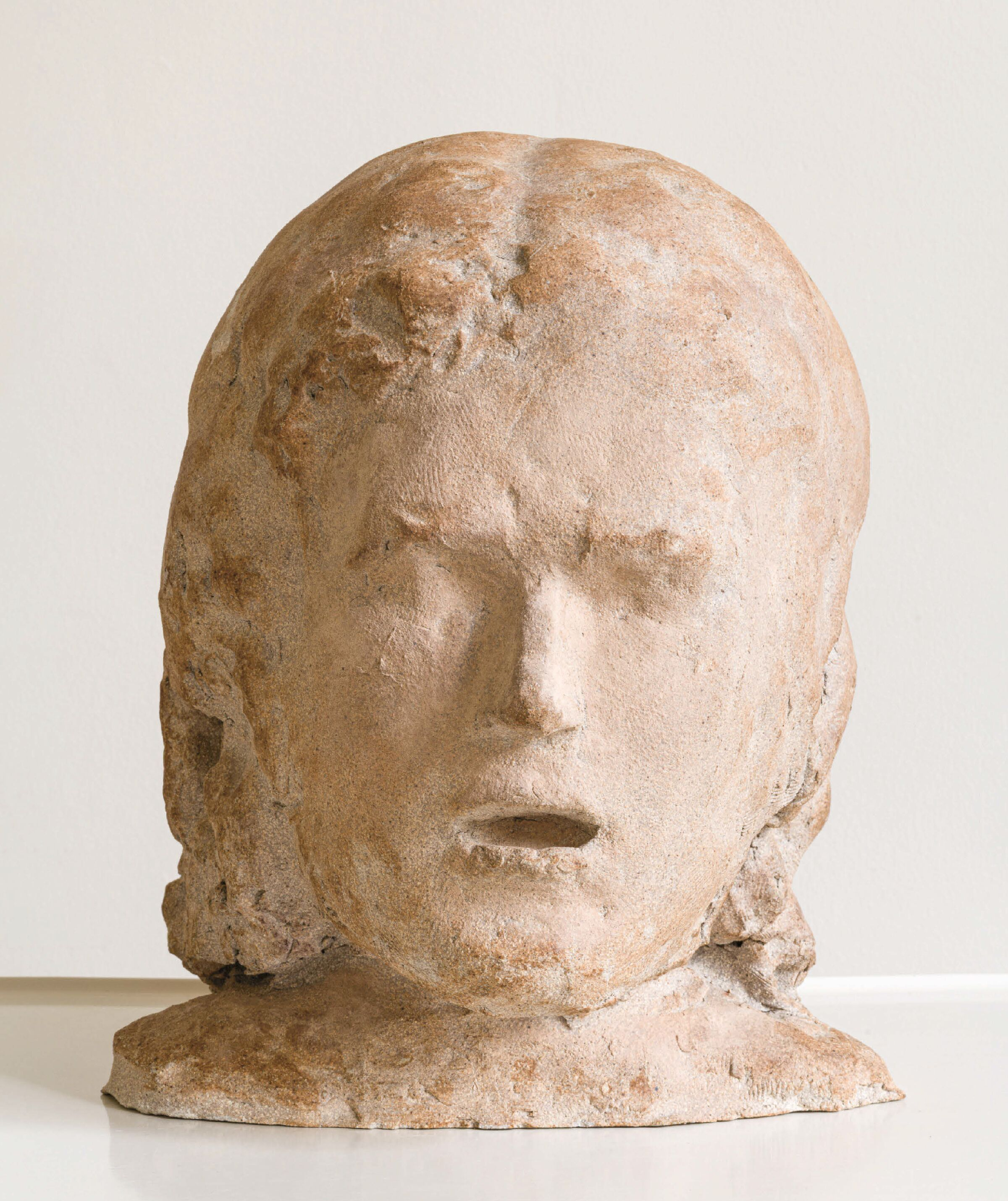
BABY HEAD #3, 2022
Ceramic, 31 × 17 × 17 cm

Right: DAVID LOVELY #1, 2024
Ceramic, pastel, 40 × 36 × 34 cm

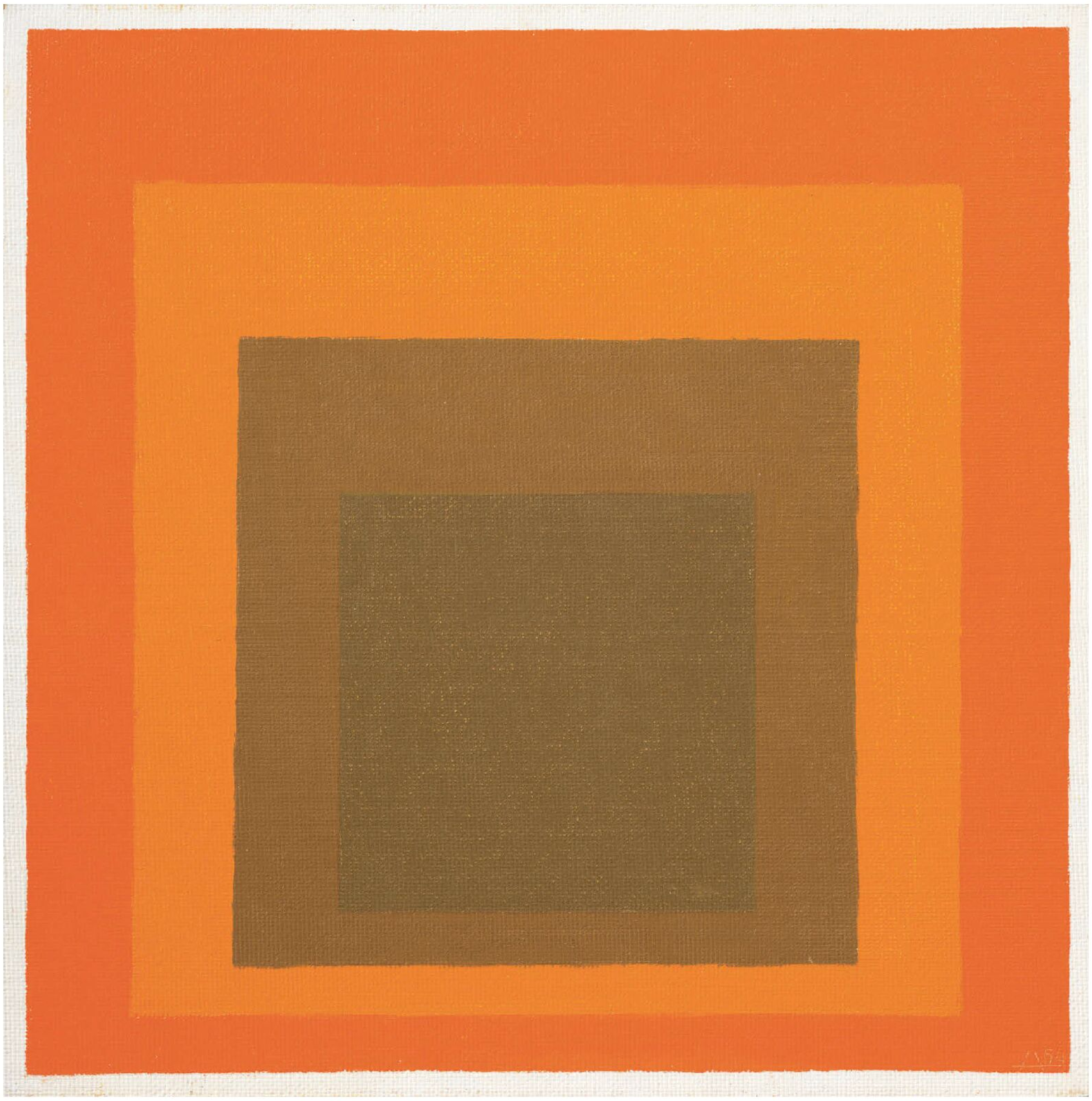
Still there’s something else about Falardeau’s faces, a quality I find even more haunting and compelling. He isn’t only pulling them out of some collective experience of faces—living faces; faces on statues, in paintings, in films, and in cartoons. He’s also pulling them out of the earth. And sending them back. I’ve been examining them up close for a good 10 minutes when Falardeau, who’s behind me, says: “There are no rules. I want to get the faces worn down to the point where you can’t tell, exactly, what they’re feeling. That’s a fine line. It’s more interesting.” Indeed. It’s as if all the pushing and pulling and pressing, all the rough modeling, reworking, and patching, has cast off any trace of personality, and maybe even of character. What’s left? What’s left are faces that are being pulled back into stone even as they’re being pushed out of it. Faces that appear to enact our coming into and out of this world, or, put another way, our leaving oblivion to be born and our entering it again to die. What’s left are faces that feel like the voices of the damned rising up out of the stage at the end of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, like the voices in his *Requiem* that accompany us on our journey away from all the faces we’ve ever known in this interregnum called life. What’s left are faces that make canards out of the idea of using your face hierarchically, aggressively in an effort to enter the attention and lifestyle economy. What’s left are faces worthy of the plaster casts of Pompeii, of that community of the buried in which none are guilty, and all deserve our love.

That’s just it. Falardeau makes these things with the conviction that they *deserve our love*. Not an art goer’s approving love. Not parental or avuncular love. Not even familial love. But love that asks for no change. Love that needs nothing to be different. Love that can still love if everything turns out to be set in stone.

Grant Falardeau’s solo exhibition at Galerie Neu in Berlin will open March 2026.



DOROTHEUM
SINCE 1707



Josef Albers, Study for Homage to the Square: "Heavy + Bright under Veil", 1964, oil on masonite, 40.6 x 40.6 cm
€250,000 – 350,000, Auction 19 November 2025

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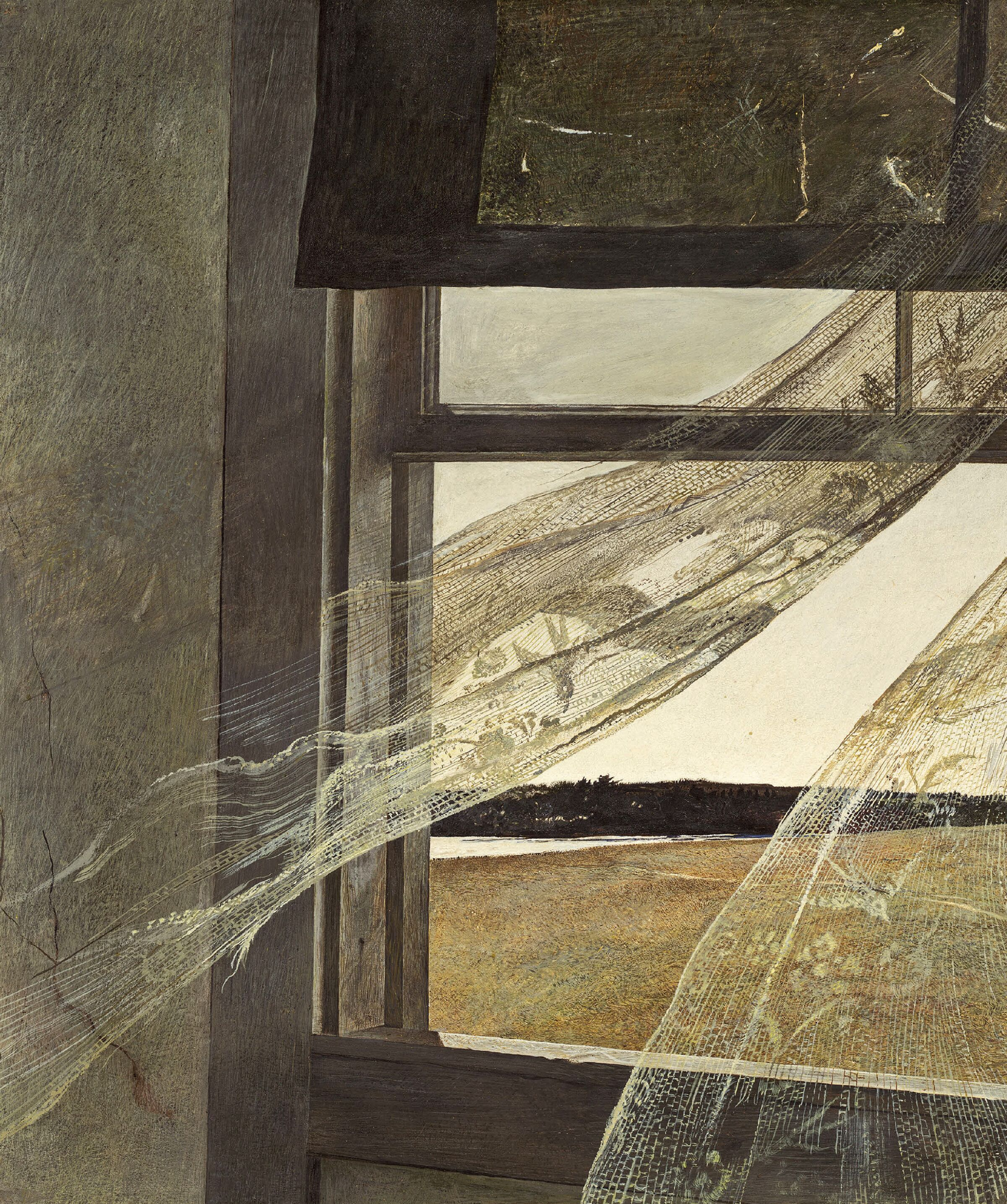
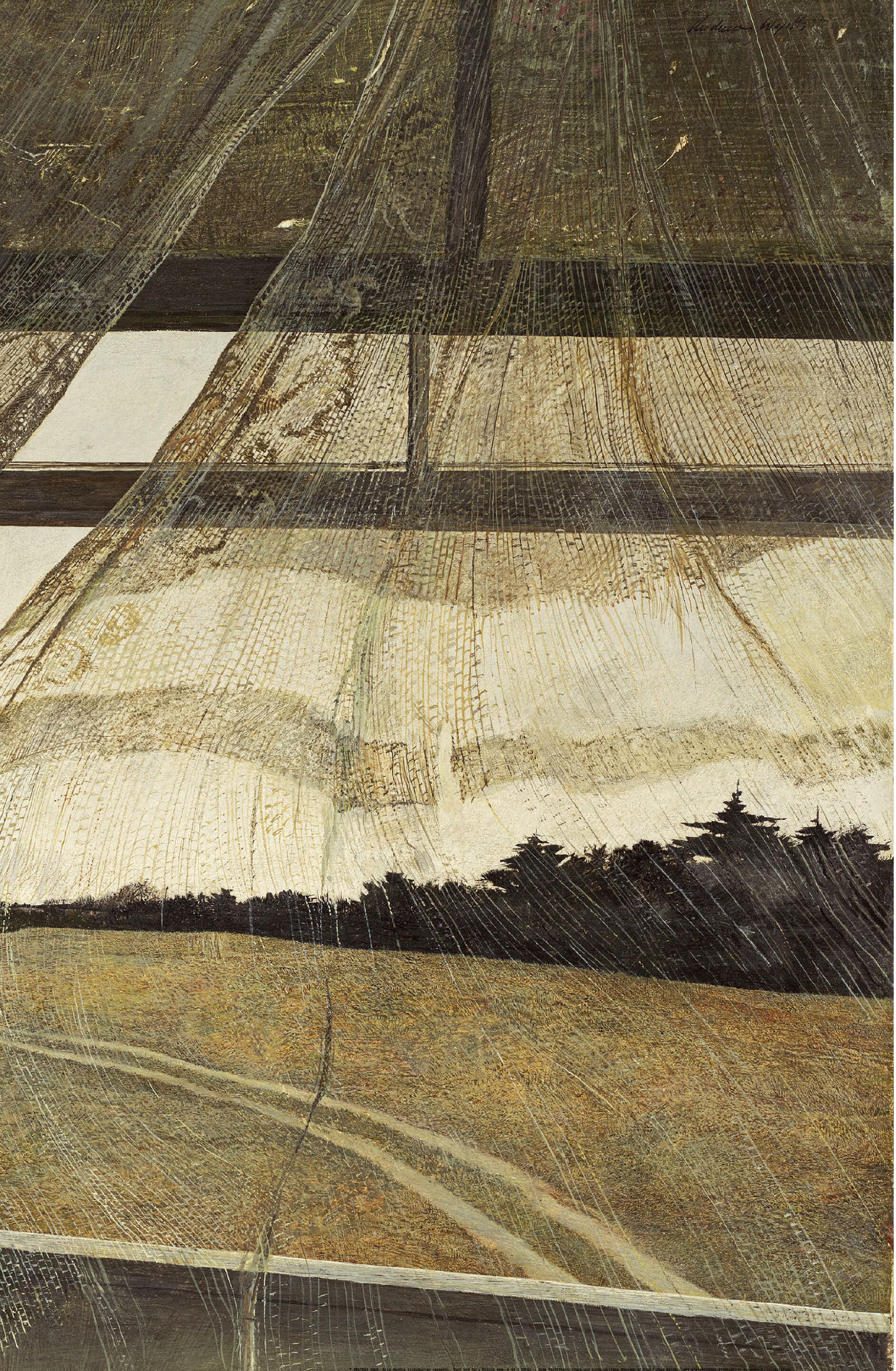
“I can’t imagine my own images, nor can I recall those of others”
— Charline von Heyl, see page 98

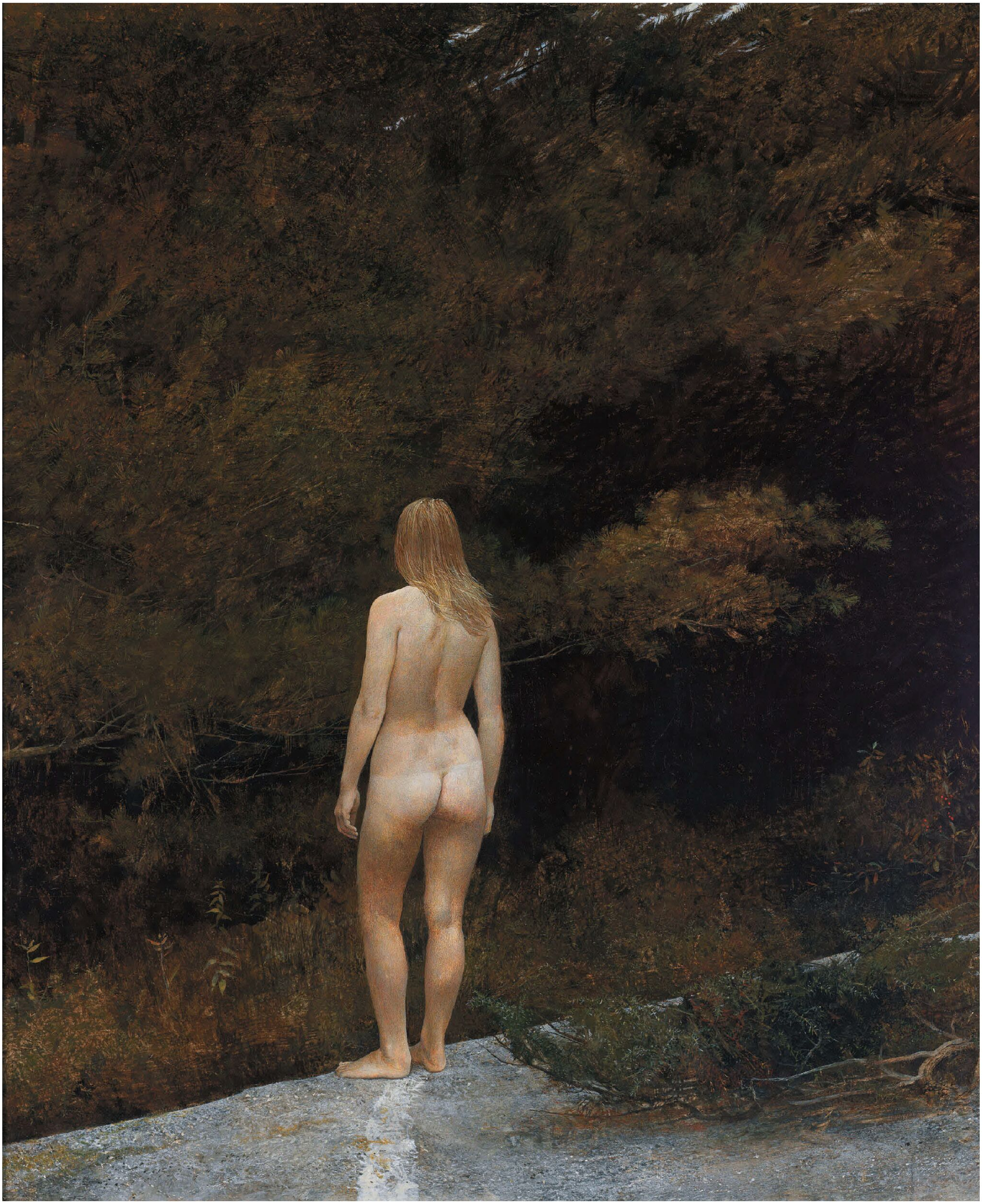




ANDREW WYETH

by ANDREW WINER

This one is personal. Let us, for a moment, forget Warhol, forget Rothko, forget them all. Let us remember, just once, the reproductions hanging in a grandmother's home, in a coal-mining town in rural Missouri. Let her grandson, *Andrew Winer*, speak. He might know that for Americans, ANDREW WYETH is still the most popular postwar artist, period. But can Winer, now an urban sophisticate trained in post-structuralist philosophy, still *feel* it? You bet he can, for once returning to the sticks and rocks and weeds, to the inescapable facts of life from which Wyeth, an emotional man of granite courage, never shrank



N.C. WYETH

Andrew Wyeth in his home, Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, winter 1959
Opening spread: WIND FROM THE SEA, 1947, egg tempera on panel, 37 × 50 cm
Previous page: INDIAN SUMMER, 1970, egg tempera on panel, 107 × 89 cm

The first Andrew Wyeths I ever saw were, unsurprisingly, reproductions. Is there any American artist who has been so reproduced? But let's not count it against him already. His work has had enough of that to last many artistic lifetimes. What accounts for that? It's a question I've been mulling over lately, one that has forced me to look back not just at *Wyeth*'s artistic lifetime but at my own. I want to know what counts *in favor* of Wyeth. It feels personal. The reproductions in question had been hand-framed and hung up by my mother's mother, who hailed from one of rural northern Missouri's coal-mining villages, where the town squares and gazebos were briefly played one day in the early 1960s by a very young Dolly Parton and her band, touring the area in a station wagon. Trust me, this is relevant. My grandmother was not a culturally literate woman, but she was well-read in Dickens and Shakespeare by the time she reached fifth grade, the end of her country schooling. This is relevant as well, for it was people like her, thousands and thousands of them, to whom Andrew Wyeth appealed. It was people like my grandmother who made Wyeth the best-known American artist of his time.

I liked him, too, initially. But for reasons that differed from those that drove my grandmother to place so many reproductions of his work around her house. The framed Wyeth prints, like the framed John Constable reproductions that shared the walls with them, did not instill in me a nostalgia for better times, or a taste for the simple pleasures of pastoral country life, but rather an appreciation of the emotional potency of art. She had mainly put up, I recall, his best-known paintings, most of them from earlier in his career: *Winter* (1946), *Wind from the Sea* (1947), *Trodden Weed* (1951), *Groundhog Day* (1959), and, of course, *Christina's World* (1948), one of the most famous American paintings, period. But there was also the strange and lonely *Sea Boots* (1976) that he painted later, which told me that even my grandmother, whose descriptions of Wyeth's work hewed faithfully to those simple country pleasures, possessed other, deeper, *darker* emotional reserves. I seemed to possess *only* such reserves when looking at the Wyeths on the wall, and I looked at them a lot. The natural world was everywhere in them, yet it wasn't the glory of nature that Wyeth had captured but something else… What? Contraction. Survival. Silence. Human matters. Paintings whose news, as William Carlos Williams said of poems, you could "die miserably every day / for lack / of what is found there." Dying didn't seem out of the question, but nor did the idea, new to me, of creating the kind of news I was finding on Grandma's walls. Those diaphanous, worn, wind-blown curtains filling the attic window in *Wind from the Sea*—why did they make me so sad? Or the peopleless dinette in *Groundhog Day*, so light-filled and yet so melancholic: one knife, one plate, one cup and saucer on a table—*who* were they for? They seemed to be only for the boy whose eyes kept landing on them, lit up with feeling, and with a flicker or two of a future in which he might want a hand in this business.

Those diaphanous, worn, wind-blown curtains filling the attic window—why did they make me so sad?

It was only later, in college and specifically in art school—at CalArts, where, by the time I got there, it was well known that a hand in this business was possibly to be had—that I was taught to hold work like Wyeth's in high suspicion. Where, in the slippery, aphoristic, stubbornly impenetrable Frenchisms of theorists like Barthes, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari—with whose work I was as busy trying to seduce co-eds as I was trying to understand the stuff—was there room for the visual bromides of an open dory boat on a beach or a rusted, upside-down pail in a field? Andrew Wyeth, I came to believe, was indeed appropriate for Grandma's wall. Art-world critics agreed, though this wasn't mainly what fueled the newfound disregard I felt for Wyeth's paintings. Rather, it was the promise of a theoretically deconstructed world, and of a girl, theoretically, who wanted to step into it with me. If there was any nostalgic romanticizing of the American landscape I wanted some part in, it was going to be the bemused and distant orientalizing of its neglected exurban wastes championed by none other than that French postmodern rock star of an intellectual Jean Baudrillard, who, in his beautiful, coffee table-like, de Tocqueville-goes-to-Burning Man book *America*, insisted that

American reality had been replaced by a new, totalizing nostalgia composed of "simulacra" and "the hyperreal." As with my art-school peers and professors, seeing everything American through the Baudrillardian lens became a delicious reflex, but interestingly I remember being unable to see the most American painter that way, even when I took a non-theoretical girlfriend (*yes*) to look at the reproductions (simulacra!) of his work on my grandmother's wall. The ironic utterances of excitement that I tried out on her, about the framed Wyeths being simulations of the hyperreal, rang hollow and false—she was not impressed.

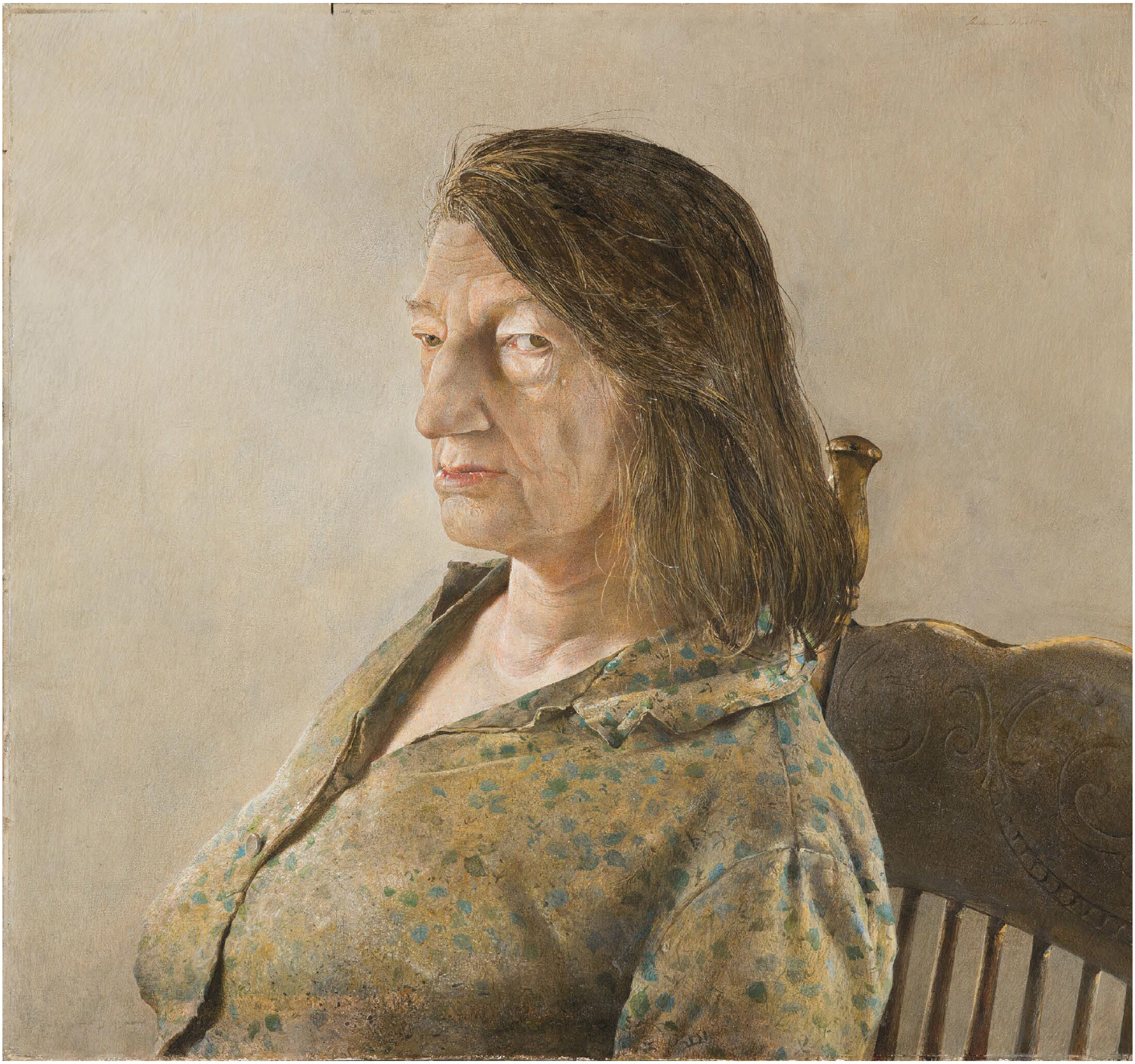
But *why*? Didn't his paintings have all the hyperrealism that Baudrillard claimed made anything a fascinatingly fake replacement for the real? What was it about them that seemed to deny the Frenchman's charming and seductive claims? Only now, after so many years, and much looking at art, have I arrived at the surprising answer: it was their hyperreality itself.

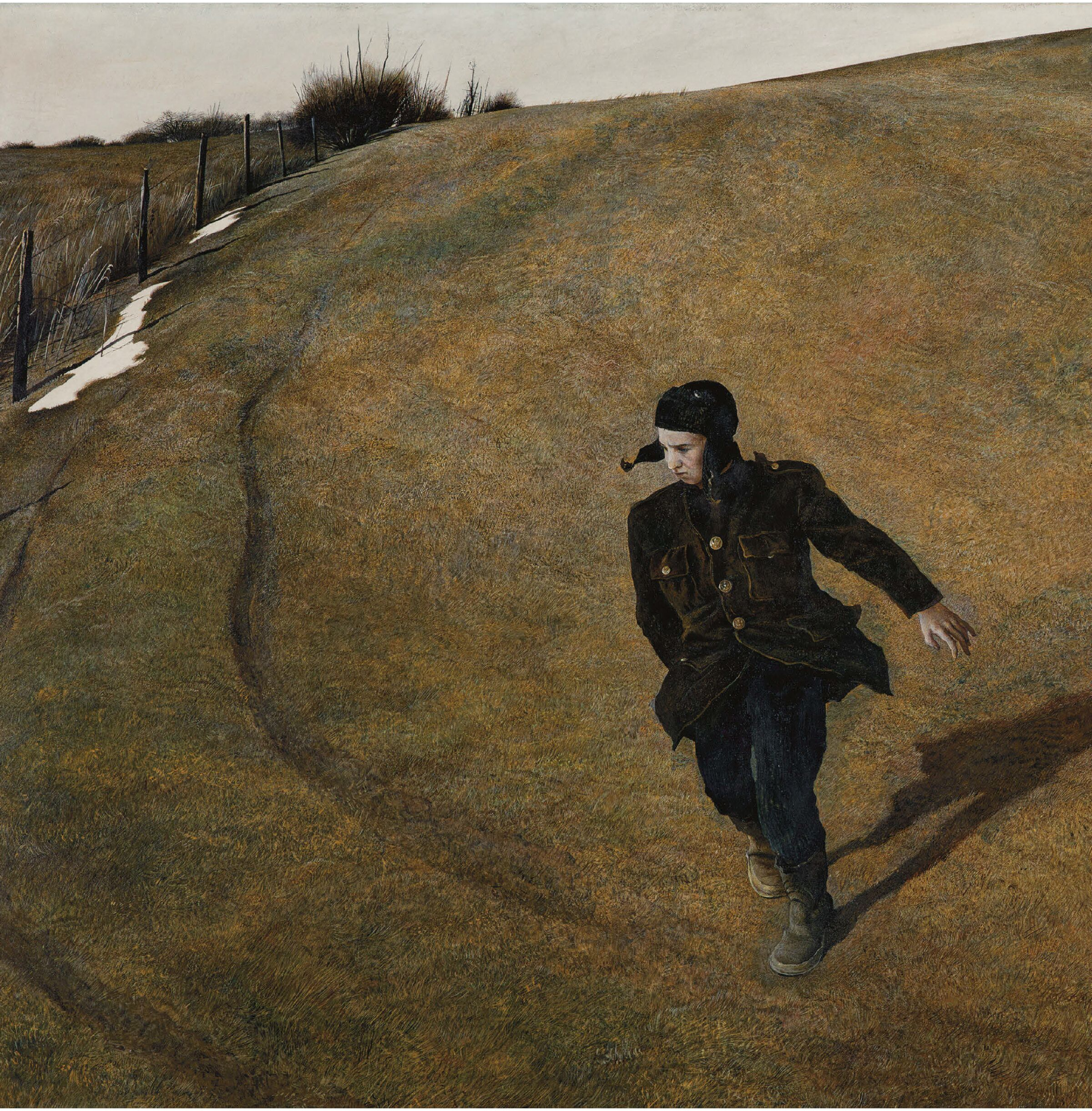
Permit me to explain. Underlying nearly all the criticism of Wyeth's work from the 1950s up through the 1980s was certainly the accusation of anachronism. In his gray- and amber-hued watercolors and tempera paintings of the friends, family, and locales the artist had known for many years (and often, since birth), critics smelled a musty, sepia-toned longing for some mythical, better past when humans and, more specifically, Americans, enjoyed an authentic relation to reality. It wasn't just that Wyeth's paintings focused on weathered old things (and people) while being wholly innocent of modern technology; his crime was also that the technique with which he painted these things was old fashioned itself. They weren't wrong. Wyeth's dry-brush method goes back at least to the early 16th century, when one of his heroes, Albrecht Dürer, employed it in his watercolors. But this should have tipped off the critics that Wyeth's was not exactly the oeuvre of a realist pining for the halcyon days of rural 18th- and 19th-century America. And if that didn't do the trick, then how about the fact that this work was, well, really fucking weird. Not for nothing did Rothko suggest that Wyeth's paintings were "about the pursuit of strangeness." Not convinced? See his figurative works such as *Above the Narrows* (1960), *Sea Dog* (1971), or *The Clearing* (1979), any one of which, with their 1970s Polaroid coloring and creepy distortions and overall ironic registers, could plausibly be taken for a John Currin or a fantastic thrift-store find. Or how about that Giacometti-bodied, Brâncuși-headed, elongated triangle of a dog staring us down in *Light Station* (1983)—has it descended the spiral stairs in order to keep us from escaping, or is it beckoning us to ascend to its spaceship? Speaking of spaceships: flipped upright, that frightening pod-like boulder that Wyeth blackens into the brown horizontal slab of *Flint* (1975) is a dead ringer for the extraterrestrial vessel—only heavier-looking, incredibly—that suddenly appears near the beginning of the 2016 sci-fi flick *Arrival* to inform humanity of time's circularity and, in a nod to Nietzsche's eternal recurrence of the same, of our fate to live our life over and over again in all its details.

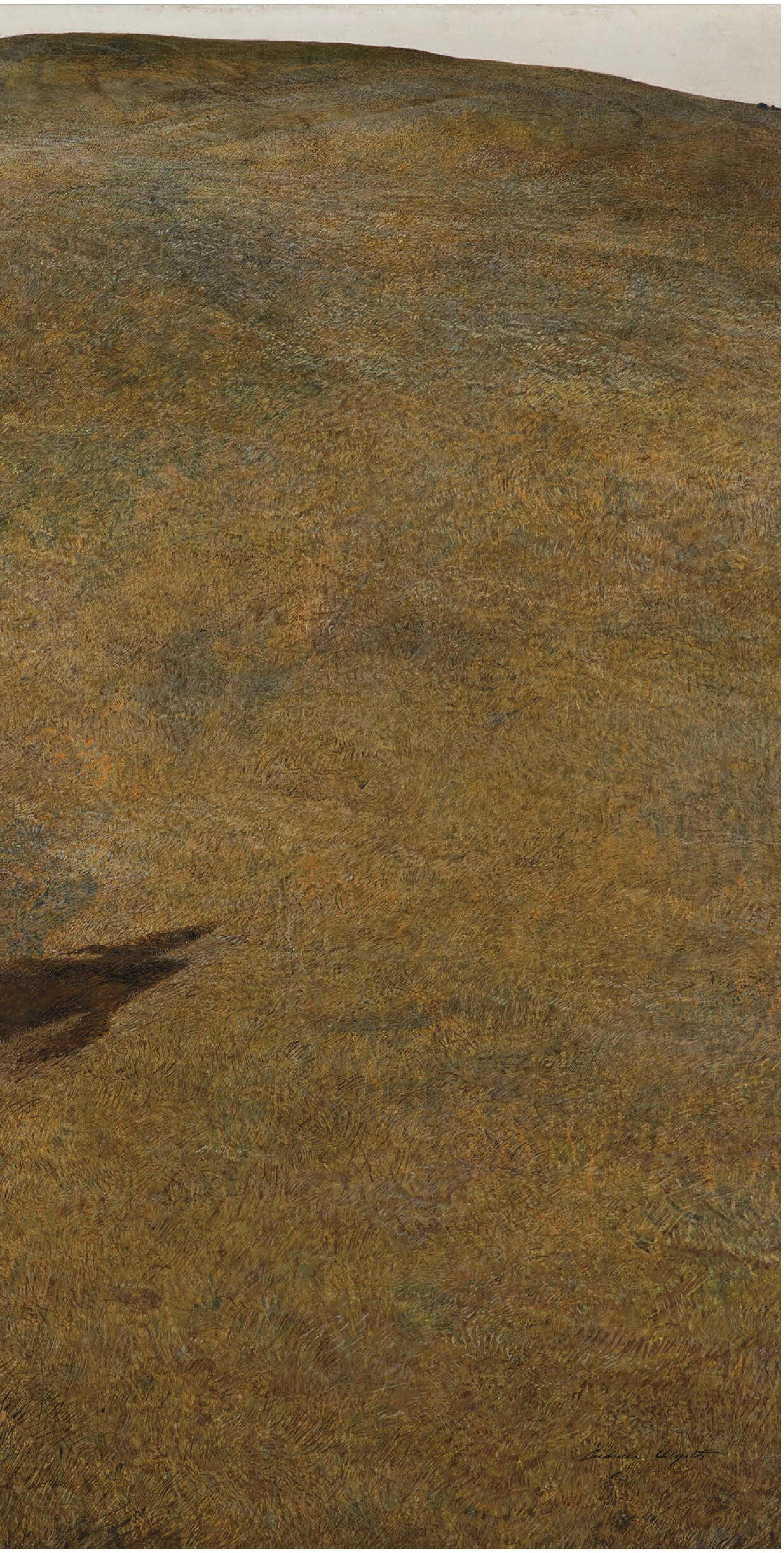
> It wasn't just that Wyeth's paintings focused on weathered old things (and people); his crime was also that the technique with which he painted was old fashioned itself

An outlandish comparison, maybe, but it is precisely that understanding of temporality, I wager, that Wyeth's work addresses. The paintings assert the presence of time, yet we rarely know the time of day. Where is the sun? Whatever the hour, from painting to painting, it is mostly the *same*. We are simply, in a Wyeth, *in* time. And yet the time is passing. How do we know this? We know it from the two kinds of pictorial modes in which Wyeth almost exclusively traffics: absences (ours) and glances. Human absences are beautifully evident in a series of works from the 70s: the aforementioned *Groundhog Day*; *The Quaker* (1976), in which two coats hang from a fireplace mantel; *The Witching Hour* (1977), a haunting masterpiece depicting an empty dining room; and *Off at Sea* (1972), the study for which did in fact show a person, a male youth, sitting on a bench in a vestry—only the

ANNA CHRISTINA, 1967, egg tempera on panel, 55 × 60 cm
Following spread: WINTER, 1946, egg tempera on panel, 80 × 122 cm







bench made it to the final painting. The second mode, what I'm calling "glances" or visual asides, if you will, are those paintings that capture what we actually notice, often only for an instant, during the interregnums of our attention. There's the Chardin-like teapot on a worn shelf in *Christina's Teapot* (1968), or the hat on a banister in *A Feather in Her Hat* (1987), or that beautifully rendered sandbank in the sublime *River Cove* (1958). *Squall* (1986) is an exemplar of both modes. Look at those two raincoats hanging on the wall, then notice the binoculars that join them, which seem to suggest that we peer out the window at the sea or out the doorway at the pavers of a path—either way, we're looking at heart-pinching absence. No wonder many critics and observers have opined that Wyeth's work is about death. But this man loved life. Every second of it. Every inch. Someone who loves life this much will hurt, hence the series of paintings and drawings that Wyeth produced that evoked his own death, 20 years before he died. The paintings ache with an awareness of passing instants, pulling their emotional weight and some of ours. Because we are too busy the rest of the time.

Wyeth's shaping of the world reflected his values and his interest

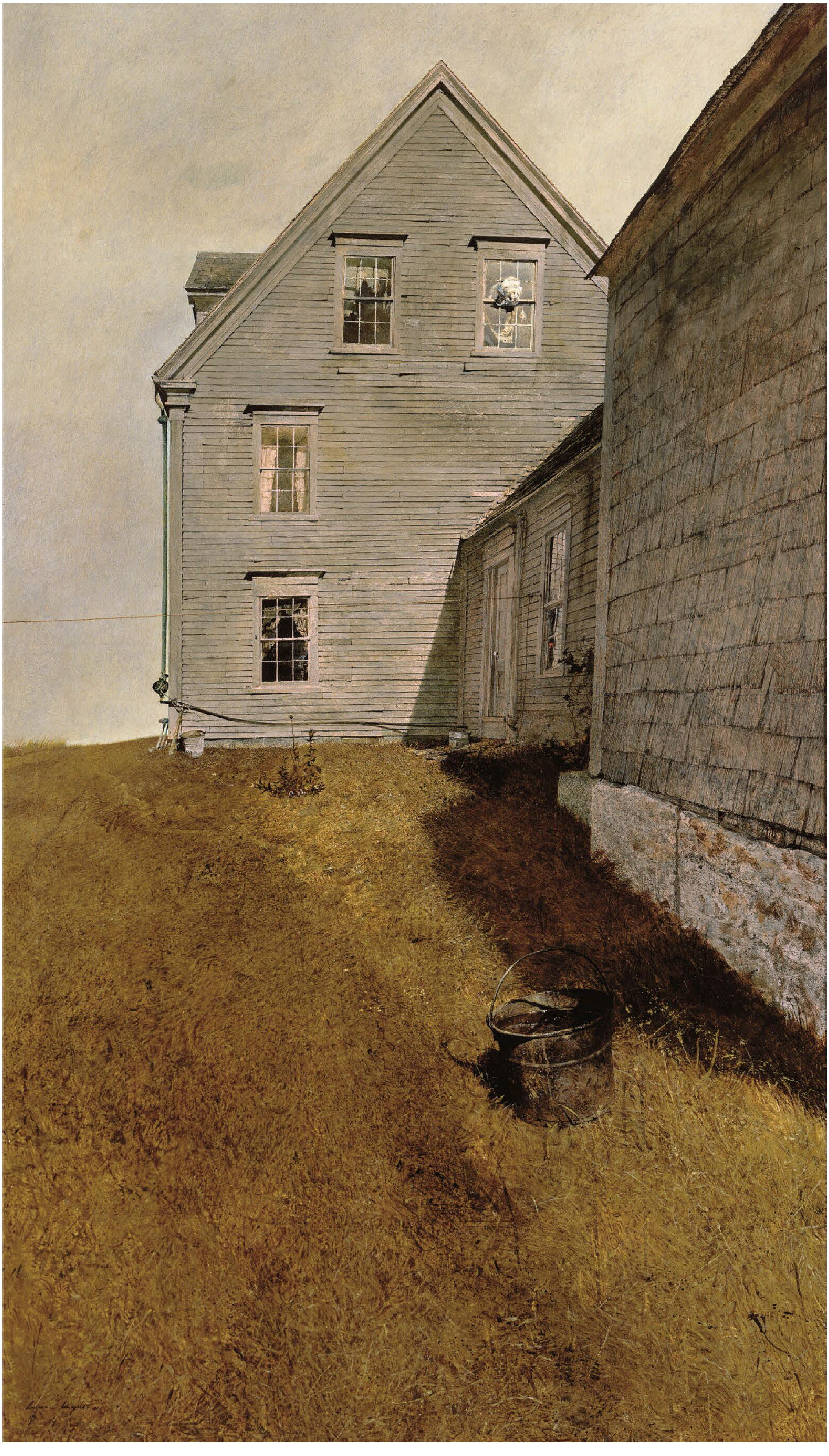
Plainly, Wyeth also dwelled on death. Not in a morbid way, contrary to some ideas that have been advanced about him, but in the way everyone does who lives in places like Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, or Cushing, Maine, the artist's two places of residence. Death is everywhere in cities too, of course, but, as with its cause—the passing of time—a distracted populace is not frequently reminded of it when heading down the street to dinner or a show or a morning meeting. For those who live in rural places, it's quite the opposite. There are, to be sure, fewer humans around for death to find; the rest of things living make up for it. I suspect that this is what is really meant when the lack of urbanity in Wyeth's work is blamed for the coldness of his critical reception. I can't help but speculate that those who find his work wanting in this way must feel reproached by it for having spent their time not paying much attention to the main game of life. It isn't hard to imagine how its directness could serve as an affront to viewers who, after childhood, were pulled away from the enchantments of a one-to-one relation with sticks and rocks and weeds and subsequently educated into a different kind of freedom, that which is sometimes called "sophistication" and other times "elitism," a state, at any rate, in which irony loosens our bond to the inevitable, permitting a different sort of play in the fields of culture. Culture, mostly an urban affair, must protect its borders assiduously, since liberty in any form is subject to its own frailty, and none more than liberation from time and necessity, the two inescapable facts of sentient life from which Wyeth, an emotional man of granite courage, never shrank. Protests of rustic boorishness and provincial earnestness, then, all too often sound like those of creatures faced with the affronts of their own finitude—distant, clubby, echoes of the wailing five-year-old's *No*, upon first realizing she must one day die. They grow quieter as the years pass. The Wyeths keep holding on to their flinty *Yes*.

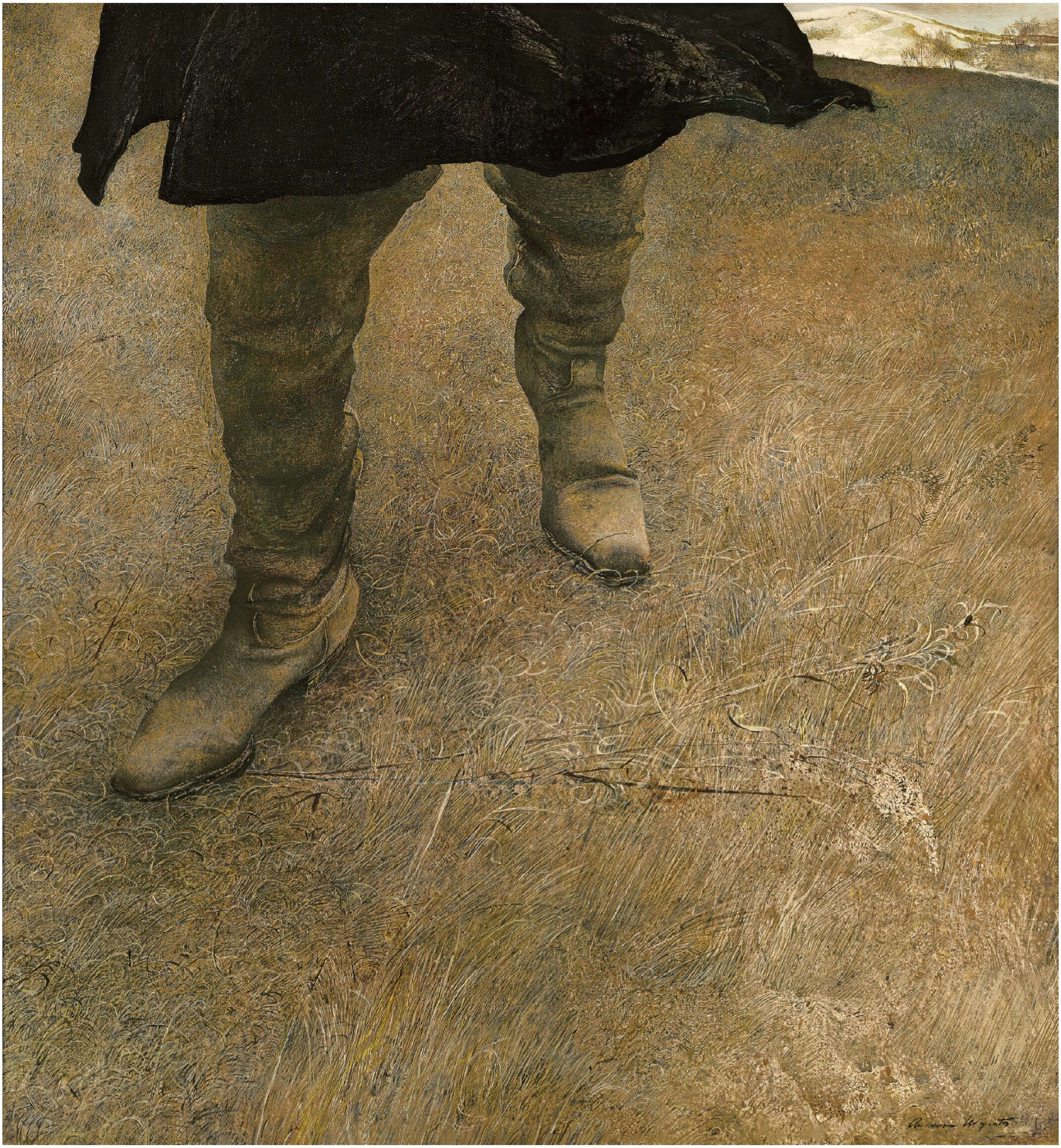
But back to the hyperreality of Wyeth's paintings. It didn't go unnoticed by critics, a number of whom, leaning literalist, seemed to feel that it suggested a hyper-*allegiance* to… reality. But Wyeth said more than once that his work not only employed abstraction but aimed for it—he aimed for it most directly in 1969 when he painted *Thin Ice*—but these avowals of abstraction-mindedness were often perceived as sops to his critics and to the reigning ethos of abstract painting and minimalism to which they, one and all, seemed to subscribe for too long for art's own good. What they didn't understand—and perhaps what Wyeth himself was incapable of clearly articulating, being, like any artist, too close to his own work—was that he was referring to the *interpretive* aspect of his method. Wyeth did, of course, possess an allegiance to reality, but more in the sense of an affirmation of life and of the world in which life unfolds. I don't think he was under any illusions when it came to the means by which humans can make intelligible sense of either. As Nietzsche himself pointed out, *that*—making intelligible sense—can only be accomplished through a perspective that alters, that abstracts. Contrary to the opinions of a number of philosophers who preceded him, his honesty about the value-laden interestedness of anyone's perspective, including his own, led Nietzsche to see that there can be no *disinterested* knowing of the world, no view from nowhere. We shape our world through narrative, through art and ideas, and have always done so. *Wyeth*'s shaping of the world reflected his values and his interest—it reflected his perspective. There is no means of making art that doesn't. This was actually glimpsed by Wyeth's critics whenever they considered the photorealism of his contemporaries such as Richard Estes, Robert Bechtle, Don Eddy, and especially Gerhard Richter, whose kind of painting, foregrounding not its mimesis but its mimicking of photography, placed its mediated nature at the center of its meaning. But when it came to Wyeth's painting, the fact that his hyperrealist technique was *self-conscious* was completely lost on his detractors.

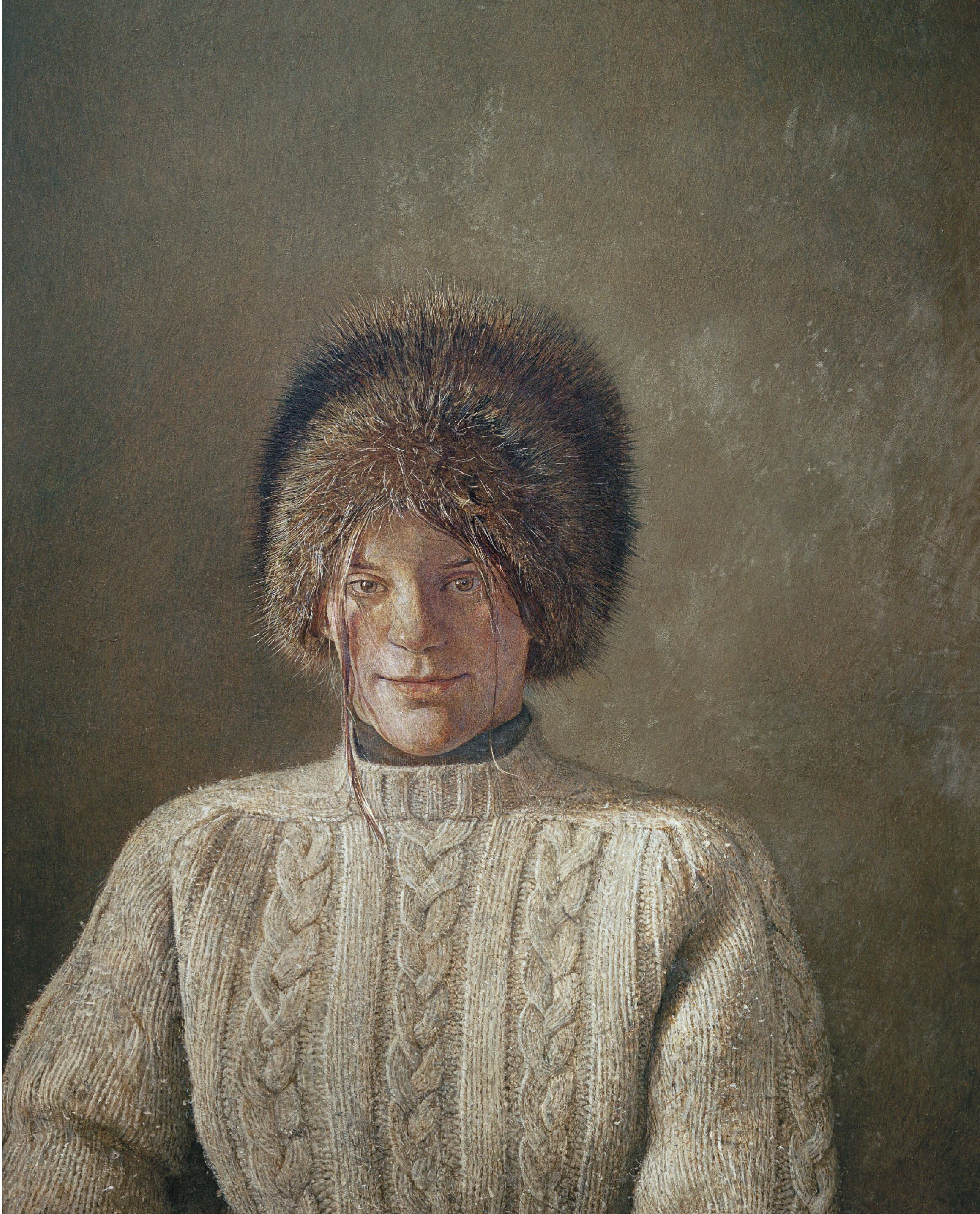
The way Wyeth painted wasn't a fake replacement for reality; it was a real perspective on it

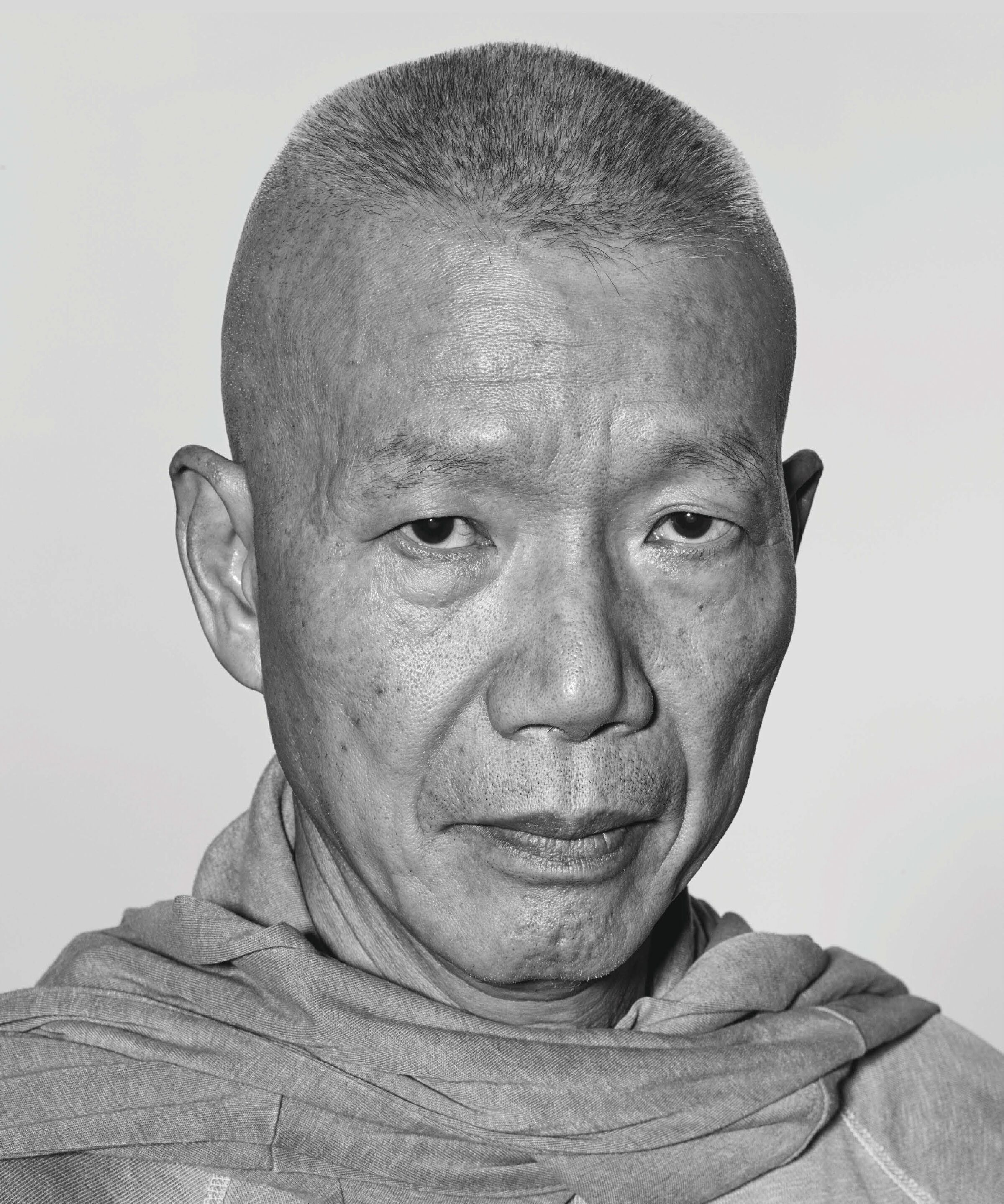
It was lost on me, too, for several decades, until I *recovered* it somewhere in all this recent wrestling with Wyeth: I remembered what my childhood self had known. The way Wyeth painted wasn't a fake replacement for reality; it was a real perspective on it, intentionally crafted to help us see and feel real things about it. No wonder Nietzsche claimed that artists are more honest than scientists: they don't hide the fact that they, like any human at any time, interpret the world. We just want them to get really good at doing what we all do, in our every waking moment, and even in our dreams. Heck, my *grandmother* knew that. So, apparently, did my girlfriend: I had to stand there in my grandmother's house on that long-ago day and listen to her chastise me for being an asshole about the very paintings that had inspired me to want to become an artist in the first place. Let it be known that I retroactively blame Baudrillard. We should all blame Baudrillard. For him to have asserted that everything was a simulacrum meant he was as nostalgic as Grandma had been for a better, simpler, more authentic time. And Wyeth? He was too busy shaping the main game of life that he loved. Every second of it. Every inch.

WEATHERSIDE, 1965, egg tempera on panel, 122 × 71 cm
Following spread left: TRODDEN WEED, 1951, egg tempera on panel, 51 × 46 cm
Following spread right: MY YOUNG FRIEND, 1970, egg tempera on panel, 81 × 62 cm









CAI GUO-QIANG is exploding into new territory. After working with institutions of the highest rank, from the Getty to Tate Modern, one of the most recognizable artists of recent memory is only now dipping more than a toe into the commercial art world. Discussing Cai's quest for transcendence, Mao's shadow, and his debut painting show at White Cube, *Frank Rose* meets the man lighting a fuse or two

The first thing I noticed was the portrait of Mao. I'd just stepped into a large atelier in Cai Guo-Qiang's New York studio on the ground floor of a one-time schoolhouse in the East Village. I was expecting to see his signature multicolored gunpowder paintings, not this. Something more like the three-meter-square canvas nearby, perhaps, showing animals engaged in highly unnatural couplings—an antelope mounting a leopard, a panda rogering a horse—as the world comes to an end in the background. So when Cai walked in a short while later, a tall, lean, ascetic figure wearing a simple gray work shirt and pants, with a faded orange scarf around his shoulders and orange sneakers on his feet, I asked him about the Mao.

Cai is of two minds about many things, but few more than Mao. Born in the ancient Chinese port city of Quanzhou in 1957, he was nine years old when China's leader set the Cultural Revolution in motion. As a third grader, he helped hound his teacher out of the classroom, never to be seen again. Soon he was made head of a Mao Zedong Thought Propaganda Team. Smash the windows! No more school! It felt liberating—until he found himself furtively burning books a few pages at a time with his father, a bookseller and collector who, in the ongoing purge of capitalists and intellectuals, was afraid of being branded a counter-revolutionary if he was caught with such things.

"Mao was a poet," Cai said through a translator as we sat at a long, narrow table on one side of the room. "I grew up in his era, more or less influenced by his political belief in Marxism–Leninism, but at the same time by his grand and poetic vision. Because Mao advocated for revolution, fighting against authority, I was also"—or so he thought. In reality, he came to understand, Mao the revolutionary was also Mao the ultimate authority. "So this eventually became a rebellion against Mao," Cai continued. "And using gunpowder was my way of breaking free from a society that was heavily controlled, very much repressed. It was my way of fighting back."

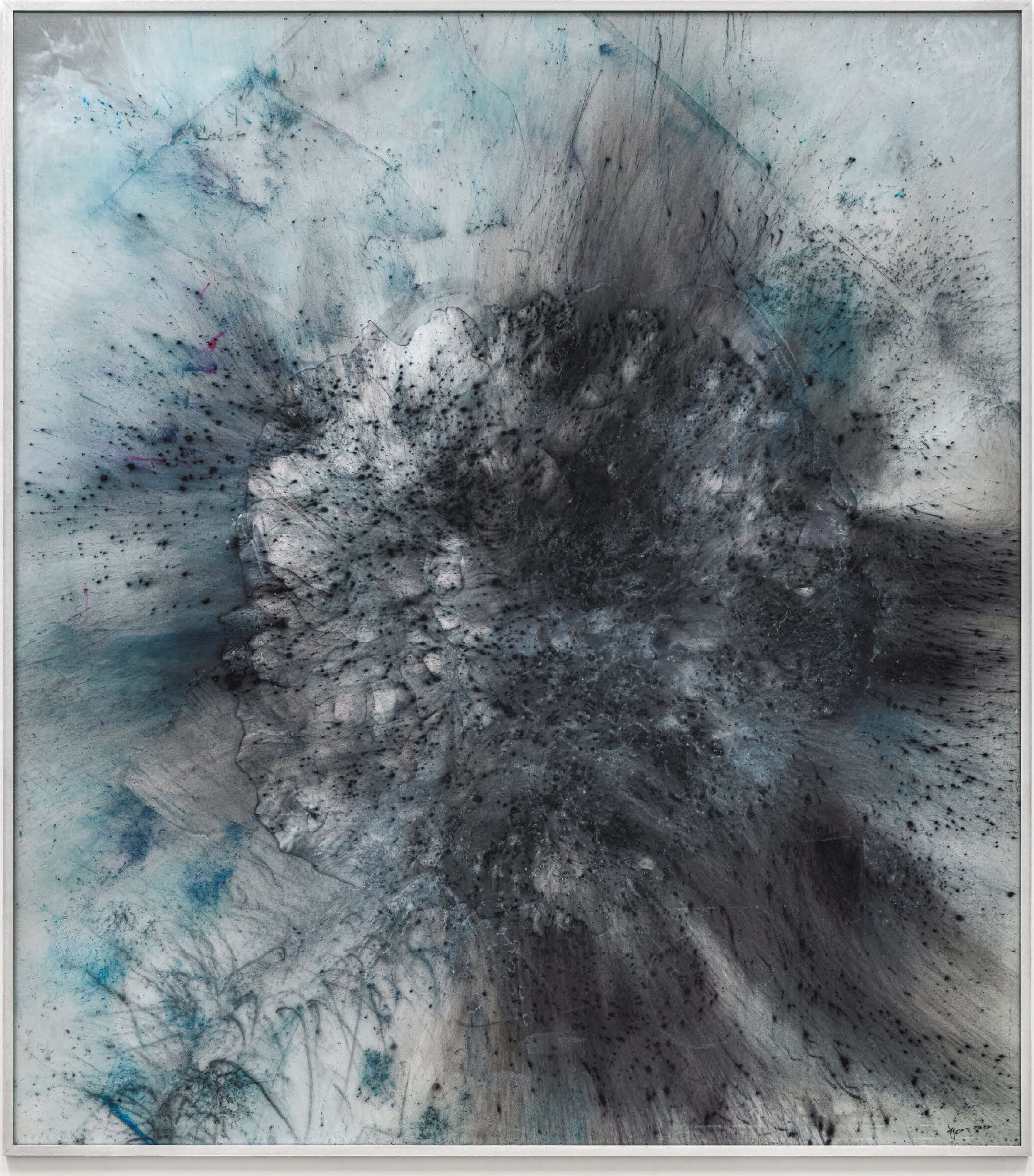
Cai began experimenting with gunpowder in the early 1980s, when he was a student at the Shanghai Theatre Academy. By 1986, the year he turned 29, he was living in Tokyo and mixing gunpowder with paint. Over time, he proceeded to the spectacular "explosion events" that made his name—thunderous apparitions that, when all went well, treated the daytime sky as a canvas for stupendously beautiful displays, appearing and disappearing within moments. Then, in 2015, he started making gunpowder "paintings," controlled explosions in his studio using colored gunpowder on canvas or glass. The results have been gorgeous, even lush, yet strangely delicate, as if the implicit violence and extreme ephemerality of his explosion events were somehow transmuted into something more stable, more human-scaled, almost domesticated. Almost, but not quite.

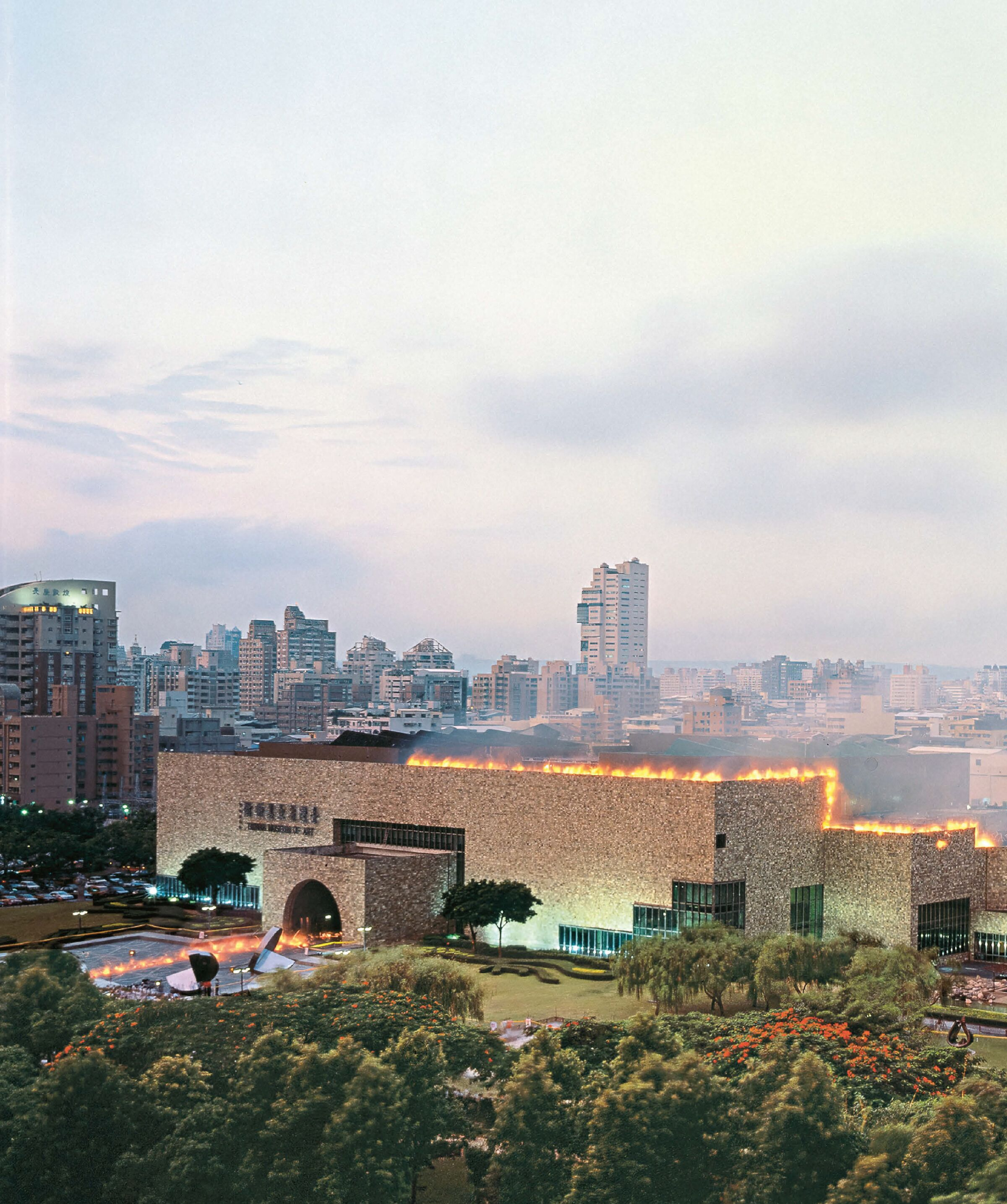
Forty-two of these gunpowder paintings are currently in a solo show at White Cube Bermondsey in London. For Cai it's a double first—the first time his work has been on view in the English capital since he staged one of his explosion events at Tate Modern in 2003, and the first time since he gained international recognition in the 1990s that his work has been shown in a major Western commercial gallery.

> "Using gunpowder was my way of breaking free from a society that was heavily controlled, very much repressed. It was my way of fighting back"

Mainly he has worked with institutions. He's had a constant stream of commissions: the J. Paul Getty Trust, the Fondation Cartier, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Pushkin State Museum, the Venice Biennale, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing… After a solo show at the Met in 2006 and a 2008 retrospective at the Guggenheim, he was besieged by gallerists as well. Jay Jopling, the founder of White Cube, a gallery closely associated with the Young British Artists of the 1990s, "first approached me in 2006, and he's been pretty persistent. He told me we don't have to have this official representation to work together—we can just do a one-time collaboration. So I wanted to just give it a try and see how it will go. I am also curious to find out, how will my works be received by these private collectors?"

WHITE FLOWER NO. 2, 2022, gunpowder on glass, paper, and mirror, 208 × 185 cm
Opening spread: RED SAILS: EXPLOSION EVENT FOR THE GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY OF QUANZHOU MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, 2024
Previous page: CAI GUO-QIANG photographed by RICHARD BURBRIDGE for BLAU International





It’s not as if Cai hasn’t sold works before. In 2021, an NFT—his first—sold for $2.5 million in an online auction to benefit the Rockbund Art Museum in Shanghai. In 2013, a single-color gunpowder drawing mounted on an eight-panel screen sold at Christie’s for $2.4 million to benefit a new museum in his hometown of Quanzhou. (Unlike his gunpowder paintings, artworks in their own right, Cai’s gunpowder drawings are studies for his explosion events.) And in 2011, the same year she dropped a record-setting $250 million on a Cézanne, Sheikha al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani bought the 17 works she had commissioned for a solo show at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Qatar. Still, by standing aloof from the world of galleries and art fairs, Cai has been able to project a certain purity that’s rare in contemporary art circles.

“Sorry we talked a lot about sales,” he said.

Cai Guo-Qiang moved to New York from Tokyo 30 years ago on a grant from the Asian Cultural Council, and for most of the years since, he’s had his studio in this 1885 brick schoolhouse in the East Village. The place suits him. He acquired it from Maja Hoffmann, the Swiss pharmaceuticals heiress and arts patron, who bought the building in the mid-90s, when it was a semi-ruin surrounded by crack dens. The neighborhood has changed dramatically since then, and so has Cai’s space. In 2015, he brought in Shohei Shigematsu of OMA to redesign it. The ground-floor offices and ateliers are now pristine and white; rooms on the cellar level are divided by thick brick archways and lined with the ubiquitous gray schist that supports Manhattan’s skyscrapers. At the rear is a traditional Japanese tearoom accessible by a *nijiriguchi* door—a feature said to encourage humility because it’s so low that to enter you have to crawl on your hands and knees.

Although the place is teeming with office workers, assistants, and interns, Cai spends most of his time, when he’s not traveling, some 40 miles away in the rolling hills of northern New Jersey. There, on a former horse farm, he lives in a sprawling glass-and-timber house designed by Frank Gehry and works in what used to be a stable. The Manhattan studio is mainly used for business meetings and, as it happens, interviews.

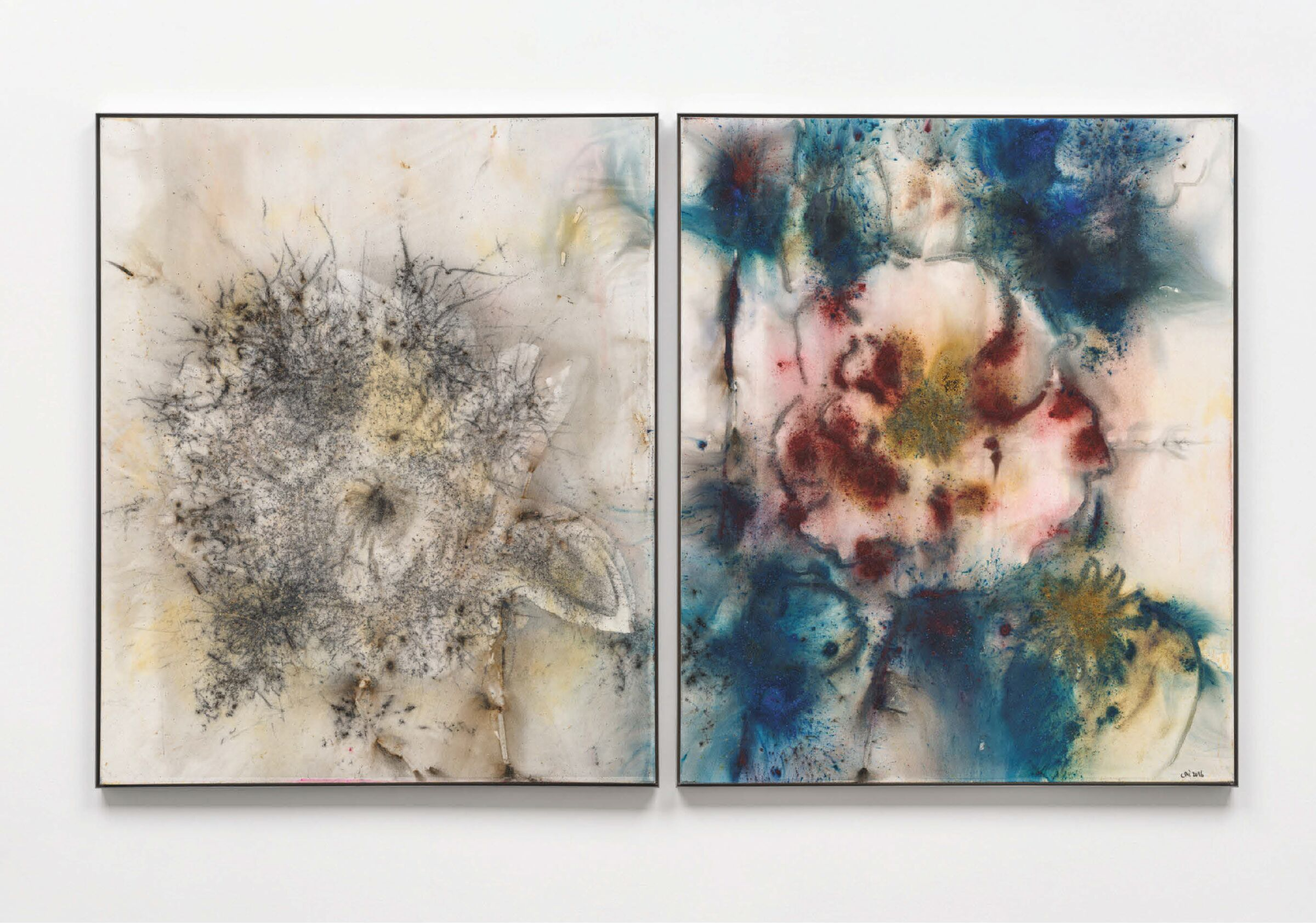
We discussed many things as we sat there—gunpowder, of course; Chairman Mao; Taoist philosophy and the importance of embracing change; his fascination with artificial intelligence. I asked him about what he calls “the unseen world”—a world that stands in opposition to the physical world, to the world our senses perceive, and that is clearly related to his belief in the mystical life force known as qi, as well as to the highly counterintuitive, to Western minds at least, theories of quantum physics.

His reply was oblique. “Since I was a child, I’ve been really afraid of death,” he said, “especially the death of my grandma.” He and his grandmother Chen Aigan were extremely close from his earliest childhood. Having renounced Christianity and embraced traditional Chinese deities, she gave him yellow paper amulets for protection and found a witch who would provide him with herbs when he was sick and explain why he’d fallen ill—because he’d gone fishing in a pond and been attacked by the ghost that lived there, for instance. But none of this made him any less fearful for his grandmother. “When I was just two or three years old, I would be very afraid that one day she would leave me. And my grandma told me, ‘Don’t worry about it. I will be with you for a long time. I will live to be 100 years old.’ And indeed, she lived until 100.”

> It’s as if the violence and ephemerality of his explosion were transmuted into something more stable, more human-scaled, almost domesticated. Almost, but not quite

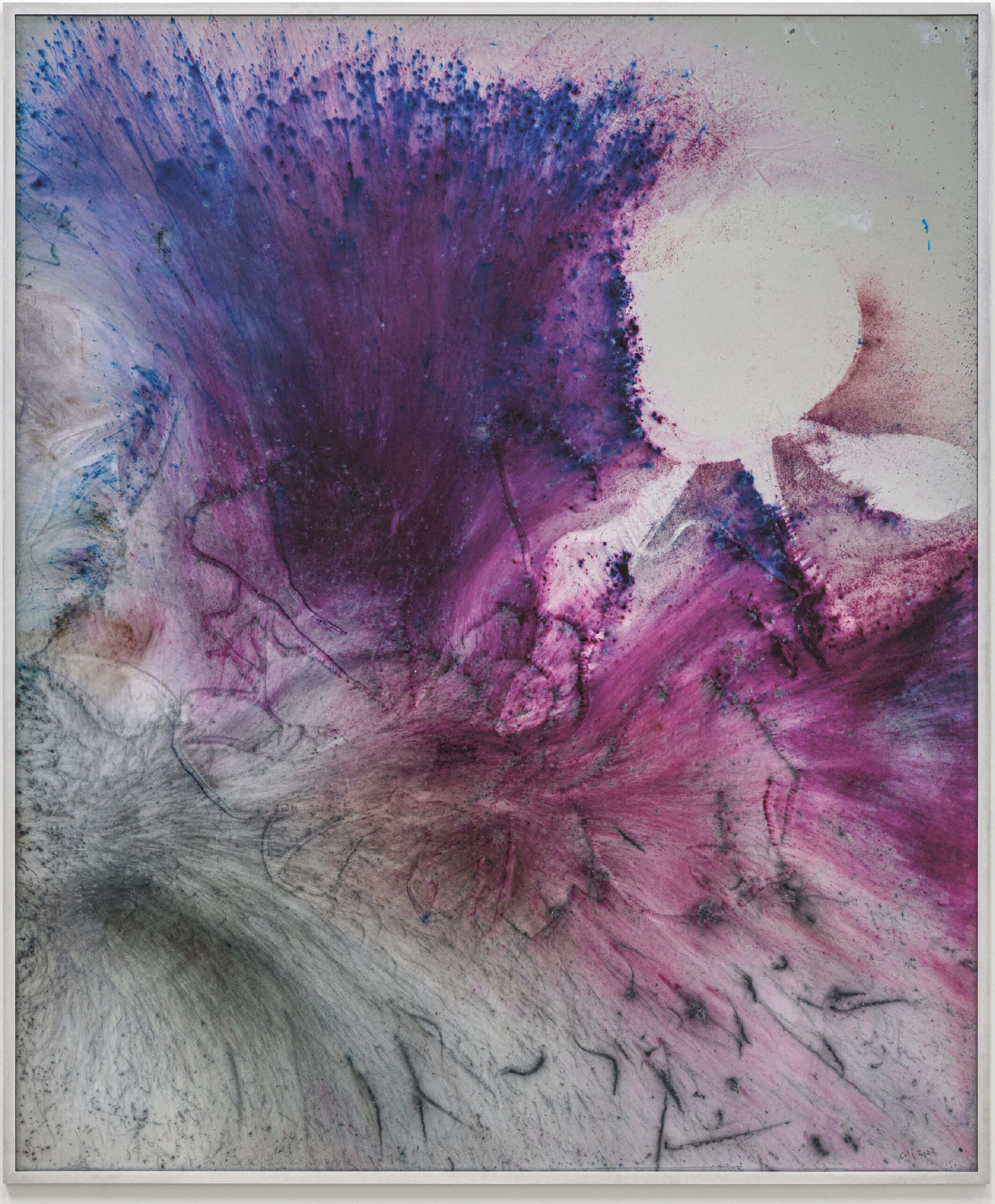
Then he started talking about what is almost certainly his most astonishing work to date. *Sky Ladder* (2015) was a wildly ambitious explosion event Cai spent 21 years trying to bring off. He finally succeeded on his fourth attempt, on a small island just off Quanzhou, a location he chose because his grandmother, who had never witnessed one of his events, would be able to see it. It involved an enormous, ladder-like construction that was rooted

POPPY SERIES: MONOCHROME AND POLYCHROME, 2016, gunpowder on canvas, two parts, each 183 × 153 cm
Previous spread: NO DESTRUCTION, NO CONSTRUCTION: BOMBING THE TAIWAN PROVINCE MUSEUM OF ART, 1998



to the ground at one end but held aloft at the other by an enormous helium balloon, its top as high as a 125-story office building. The ladder was coated with yellow gunpowder, so when lit from the bottom at night it became a golden apparition climbing into the sky. The event took all of 250 seconds, but the sense of a life force ascending to the heavens was unmistakable. "*Sky Ladder* was my gift for my grandmother," Cai said. "One month after I realized *Sky Ladder*, she passed away." He paused for a moment. "A lot of today's conversation is me recalling my old memories," he said. And then he proceeded to recall more.

"In childhood, I liked to hide under my covers in bed and listen in secrecy to radio stations from foreign countries—the Voice of America, the radio station from the Soviet Union, or the radio from Taiwan, which was just across the strait from my hometown. At the time of the Cultural Revolution, if that kind of activity got discovered, the consequence was pretty dire. And then when I grew up, I started to do *Projects for Extraterrestrials*," a long-running series of artworks that he imagined might start a dialogue with alien intelligences. "And now, when I'm developing my AI model, I think about AI evolving into this interspecies intelligence. So looking back, I think I have constantly been looking for a distant land, a distant destination that can be the unseen world or the other shore. And all of that has to do with uncertainty and chaos, which I find to be closely related to the essence of the universe. That feeling of anxiety and uneasiness as a child listening to foreign radio stations under my covers, and this uneasiness I had when using gunpowder and now using AI—these are all similar in a sense."



THE LINGERING SOUND OF POPPIES NO. 2, 2022, gunpowder on glass and mirror, 186 × 156 cm

Following sprread: RED SAILS: EXPLOSION EVENT FOR THE GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY OF QUANZHOU MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, 2024

Cai was 57 when he finally realized *Sky Ladder*. The year was 2015—the year OMA reinvented his East Village studio, the year he started making his brilliantly colored gunpowder paintings. And while he has continued to produce explosion events and gone on to experiment with new, digital technologies—virtual reality, NFTs, AI—these gunpowder paintings represent a significant shift. They show his continued fascination with gunpowder, and with all that it represents for him, but they also recall his youthful longing to be a painter.

> “I want to transcend reality, to reach a higher, spiritual dimension that is beyond the space-time of reality”

Cai’s development as an artist began with his scrounging of paint and canvas, or of paint and canvas substitutes, as a penniless youth in Quanzhou and then in Shanghai. Soon he began to experiment, setting the paint on fire or using a fan or a hairdryer to blow it in different directions, but the results were unsatisfying. “I found both blowing wind and burning too controllable,” he explained, “in the sense that I could still very easily control how it was going.” Gunpowder appealed because it was much more difficult to manage. By 1984, he was mixing the powder with paint and setting his canvases alight.

He was well aware of the danger. A few years earlier, two of his cousins had stuffed some gunpowder into a small bottle and lit it with a homemade fuse. They were planning to throw it out the window to scare some other kids, but before they could do so it exploded in his younger cousin’s hand, blowing off three of his fingers and sending a shard of glass into his older cousin’s neck, leaving him dead. “But through gunpowder I found a way to let the unseen energy and accident guide my creative endeavors,” Cai said. “It’s in a sense like submitting myself to destiny. So in that process I have a dialogue with the unseen world and its energy.”

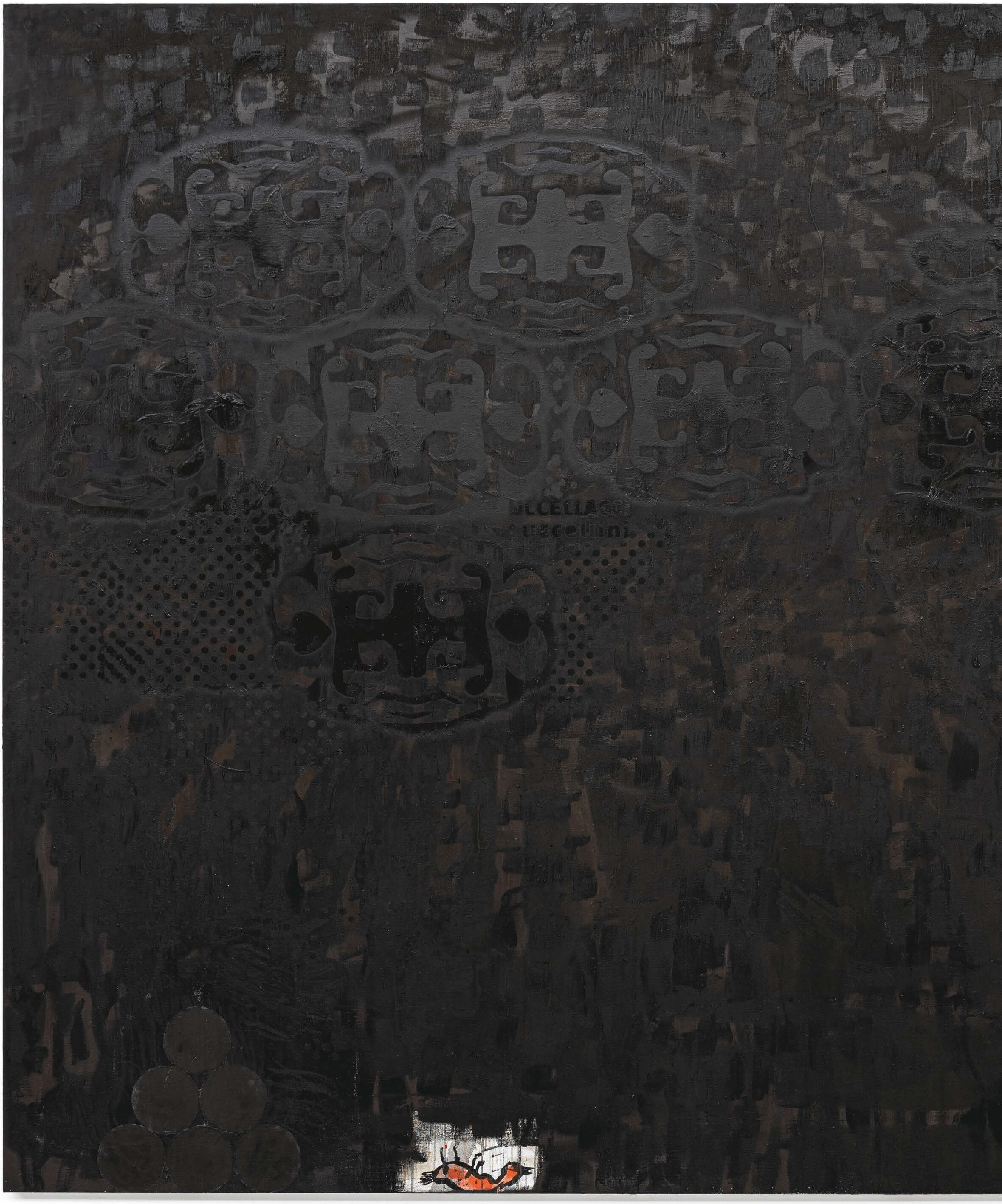
Eventually he did away with the paint and turned to gunpowder as his primary medium. His first explosion event, in 1989, lasted all of two seconds. He had been thinking of returning to China from Japan, but the regime’s assault on anti-government protesters in Tiananmen Square that year made him think again. Instead, he joined an outdoor art exhibition in suburban Tokyo, set up a yurt that resembled the tents the protesters had erected in Beijing, and exploded it with gunpowder. He called this *Human Abode: Project for Extraterrestrials No. 1*. In a way it harkened back to his adolescent under-the-covers listening habits. “I think my pursuit of the radio stations of enemy countries, whether that’s the unseen world or the distant, other side of the world, was also a will to break free from control, free from confinement, free from my disappointment in reality.”

But Cai is a wizard of paradox, a maestro of duality, and as he spoke it became increasingly clear what that means for him. “When we are facing these setbacks, whether from the political situation or in our personal lives, we tend to pursue something that’s more distant or more permanent. I want to transcend reality, to reach a higher, spiritual dimension that is beyond the space-time of reality. But at the same time, I am confined by the reality I live in and I am inevitably influenced by that reality. So I am like a pendulum that is constantly oscillating between two ends.”

He paused for a moment to let his translator catch up. “As an artist, I have many goals that I want to realize. For example, when you are painting, you would need canvas, you would need fire, you need to ignite the canvas, and you need to make lots of controls.” (Obviously these are not all things other painters need, but Cai is not like other painters.) “I have this strong desire to accomplish these goals, which results in a sense of autocratic control. But at the same time, I yearn for this freedom. I yearn for this otherworldly miracle to happen to me, and then that is like democracy.” The question, then, is “how can we give our life a bigger freedom?”

Democracy and autocracy, freedom and control, gunpowder and paint: ever since he was a child, Cai has been drawn to both. It was at this point in the interview that I realized, how could he *not* have a portrait of Mao in his studio?

The exhibition *Cai Guo-Qiang: Gunpowder and Abstraction 2015–2025* at White Cube Bermondsey closes November 9, 2025.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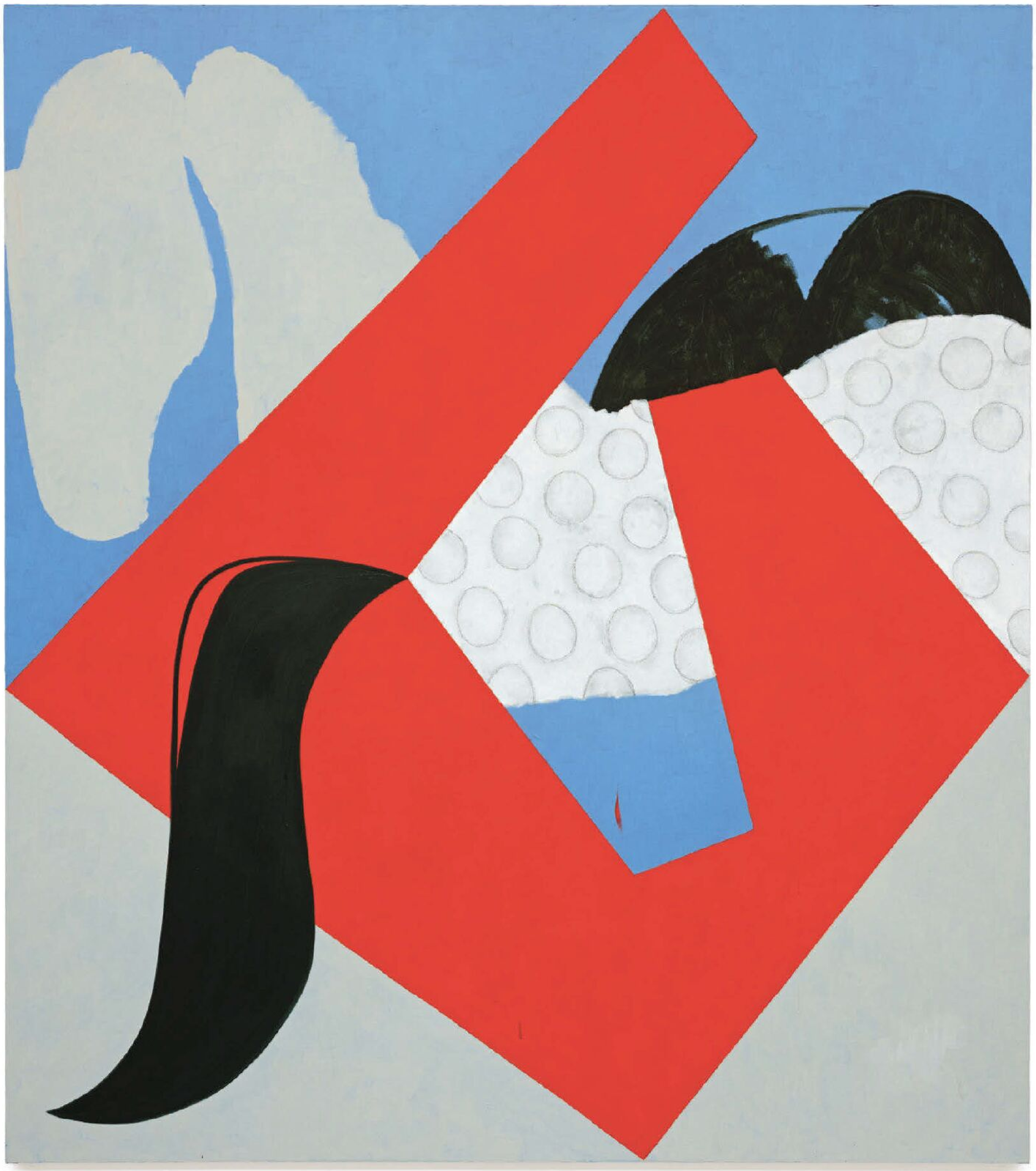

CHARLINE
VON HEYL

in conversation with
MAX DAX

anne Diel
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Paintings as machines, paintings as batteries: on the eve of a major new show in Brussels, CHARLINE VON HEYL sits down with *Max Dax* to discuss thinking without words, the freshness of Van Eyck, and the pure joy of the process and presence

Portrait by
CHARLIE DE KEERSMAECKER

Opening spread left: DECREATION, 2025
Acrylic, charcoal, and spray paint on linen, 208 × 198 cm

Opening spread right: DALA, 2024
Acrylic, charcoal, and oil on linen, 208 × 188 cm

Charline von Heyl is today one of those rare artists about whose work her peers, as well as critics, have only good things to say. Max Dax is certainly one of them. In what follows, Von Heyl talks almost from within her paintings, from a place so close to the work you might feel as though you're standing directly before one of her canvases. In fact, it's all about the work, specifically, the new paintings premiering at Xavier Hufkens this fall.

Some biography, then. Born in 1960 in Mainz, Germany, Von Heyl studied painting in Hamburg under Jörg Immendorff, for whom she would later work as an assistant, and later in Düsseldorf under Fritz Schwegler. Attracted by the provocative atmosphere of 1980s Cologne, she relocated to the city that the likes of Albert Oehlen and Martin Kippenberger called home, securing her place in the history of the scene with her participation in 1990's *The Köln Show*, a group exhibition now considered legendary. Slowly, the village-metropolis on the Rhine was being drained of much of its former life, and Von Heyl, like many others, moved to Germany's emerging art capital, Berlin—before finding a home in New York and never looking back.

In the US, she was quickly accepted as a "painter's painter," earning her first institutional recognition in 2005 with *Concentrations 48* at the Dallas Museum of Art. Two retrospectives then followed: *Charline von Heyl: Now or Else*, which toured from Tate Liverpool to Nuremberg's Kunsthalle, and a second that in 2011 traveled between the Institutes of Contemporary Art in Boston and Philadelphia. Her biggest US survey show came seven years later, *Charline von Heyl: Snake Eyes*, which opened at the Hirshhorn Museum and then traveled on to Hamburg's Deichtorhallen.

But through it all, as Von Heyl tells Dax, she never developed a style, never settled for any one particular mode—and, in that eclectic process, revitalized abstract art.

MAX DAX: Charline, you moved to the US from Germany in the 1990s, already having made a name for yourself as an artist. Do you consider yourself a German or an American painter?

— CHARLINE VON HEYL: Neither, actually. I am just a painter. Of course, where your roots are and where you live make a difference, but the world—especially the art world—is just not that local anymore.

When you started out, you were part of a group of like-minded individuals in Cologne and Hamburg. You were in dialogue with people who now all have their own voices and have changed the art world. How did rubbing shoulders with such strong personalities as Martin Kippenberger, Albert Oehlen, and Mayo Thompson shape you?

—It was an exciting time, with so many brilliant minds and fresh art. There was invigorating dialogue. It was challenging, but also inspiring and motivating. I was actually living with Mayo Thompson at the time. I consider myself lucky to have started out like that. It always felt like the right time and place. But that was a long time ago.

Are you a 21st-century painter?

—I see painting as anachronistic. That's part of its power. Of course, I am not oblivious to what is going on right now, for better or worse, but yes, this is the 21st century. But I believe painting needs to transcend that to be relevant. Even if it's soaked in it. As a painter, I don't live in the 21st century. I live in the present. In that sense, I would say that I'm a painter of the present. I am painting presence.

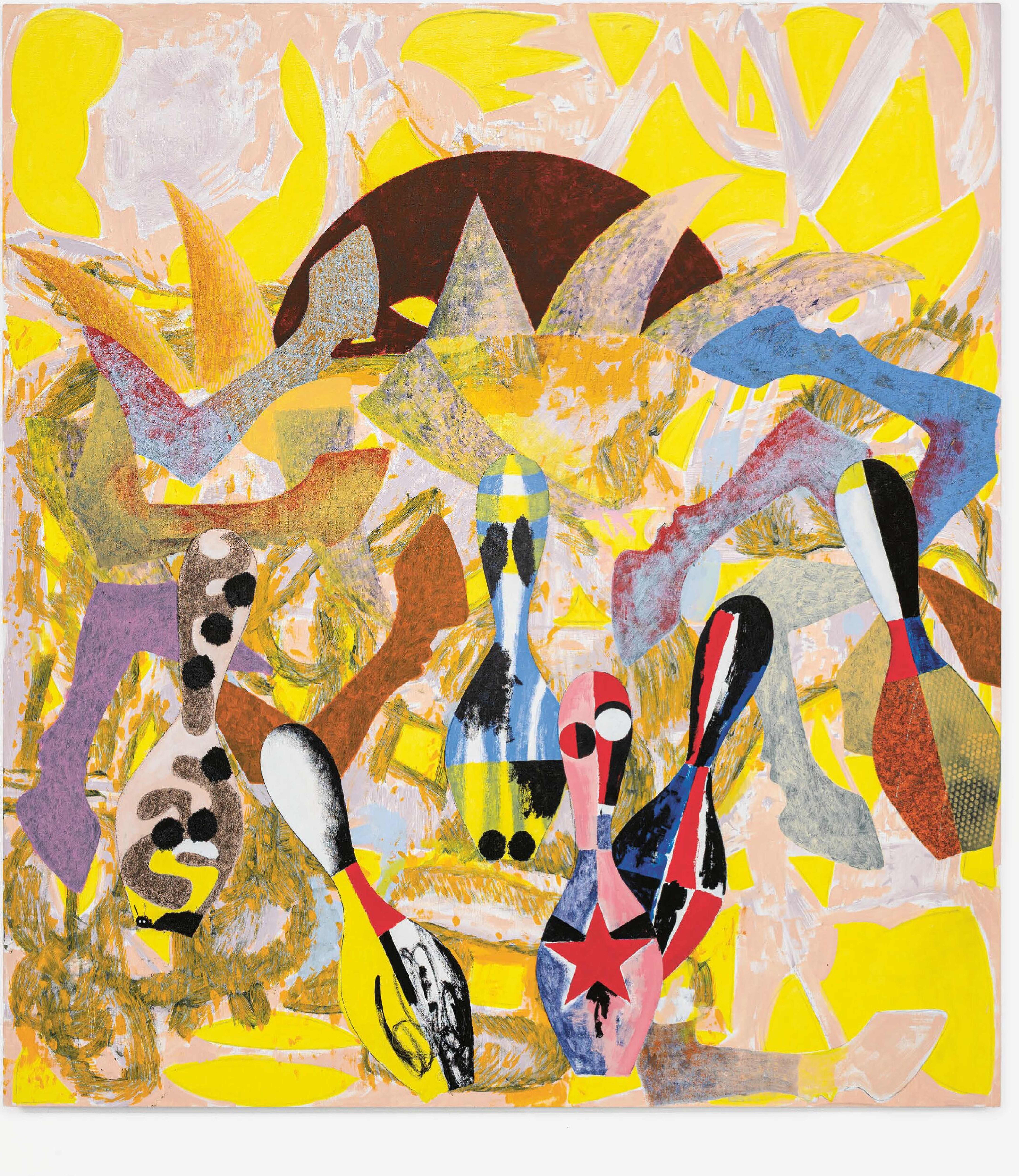
As Andrei Tarkovsky said, "If art wants to touch its audience, it must be genuinely personal." Any artwork must contain your own story to be substantial, even if it's filtered beyond recognition.

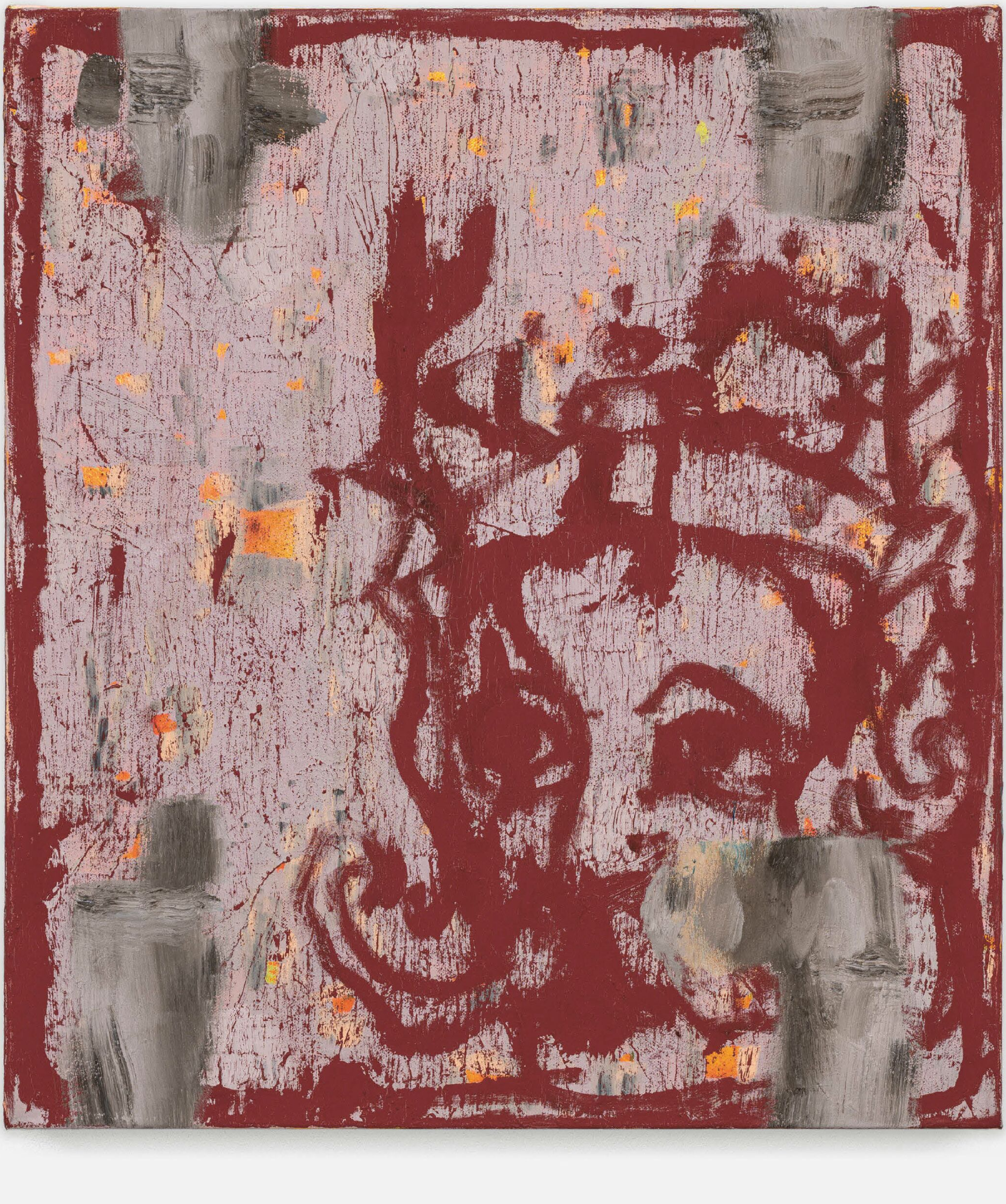
—He's absolutely right. Incidentally, painting cannot function any other way. For a painting to come into being with power, it must be as enigmatic as I am to myself. Sometimes, it almost feels as if it develops in parallel with my intentions in a revelatory way. This process is inconceivable without my own thoughts, history, and feelings—elements that have an ambivalent relationship to each other, yet propel each other forward. That's at the heart of it. Otherwise, it would just be a product or design, and ultimately uninteresting. But it's complicated, since being authentic, which is what this is about, is a necessity but also somewhat of a fantasy.

About 20 years ago, you started titling your paintings, adding a meta level. It immediately raised the question of your elective affinities, which lie outside of art, in areas such as film, literature, and music.

—I love the term "elective affinities." So much in painting is exactly that, on so many levels. Giving a title to a painting is an act of naming

KUNTERBUNTERGANG, 2025, acrylic, charcoal, and oil on linen, 208 × 188 cm





“SI LE ROI …,” 2023, acrylic, charcoal, and oil on canvas, 52 × 46 cm

it—a final touch—and it often provides a key to unraveling the strange chains of associations usually hidden within.

One of the paintings exhibited in Brussels at Xavier Hufkens is named after the film *Uccellacci e Uccellini* by Pier Paolo Pasolini. What does it mean to connect a painting to existing content in this way?

—I watched *The Hawks and the Sparrows* in English while working on the painting. The great Totò plays the leading role. There’s an apocalyptic mood in the film reminiscent of Samuel Beckett, but it’s also very funny. It’s about the Sermon on the Mount, and Totò’s task is to study the language of the birds and understand what they’re saying to each other. In the end, he learns that even birds are not always peaceful. Pasolini’s movies are aesthetically satisfying too, as are the cover designs of his books and the posters. I fell in love with the lettering on one of the posters: “Uccellacci,” meaning “big birds,” is written in capital letters; and “Uccellini”—“small birds”—is written in lowercase, in a cool mid-century font. The juxtaposition works almost like an image. I had to make a stencil, and I couldn’t stop putting it everywhere: the studio floor, the studio wall, my T-shirt. Finally, it jumped onto two of my paintings. For a moment, I thought, “Shit, I ruined them.” Writing on a painting is problematic. It’s hard for a picture to be visual when there’s text on it. But it worked so well that I left it in. Only then did I add some birds. The words in the painting were an instinctive move. I was surprised that I didn’t edit them out, and now the work is about that. Big birds, small birds, and the language of birds.

You rarely reveal your sources as openly as you do in your Pasolini painting.

—There isn’t a clear cause-and-effect relationship that can be revealed in a linear fashion. I also don’t think it would be helpful to have that, nor do I think it matters. Ultimately, the painting should evoke something in the viewer that I don’t want to control. They must make the painting their own and interpret it as they wish. The formal moves are so arbitrary and often jump in such an incomprehensible fashion that, even if I wanted to, I wouldn’t be able to sum up what happened and where it came from.

Do you create an environment that’s like a stage on which you can paint better?

—Exactly. I really do curate my studio. Once a body of work leaves, I take everything off the walls and pin new pieces up before starting again. Sometimes I make paintings just for decoration, and even those can end up in other paintings. For example, I copied and pasted by hand a tiny painting that I called *Nymphy* (2024) into a larger painting, *Twiggy* (2024). This is part of the process. In the end, though, the painting becomes its own entity, indifferent to what I put into it, or why. Of course, I push for a certain vibe when I see that it’s going in an interesting direction. But a painting is often finished before I’ve had a chance to form my own opinion about it. Then, I sit on the sofa, baffled, and look at it, trying to understand it. I simply enjoy the fact that a new painting has manifested before my eyes.

> Like a film director who shoots more scenes than necessary for a movie, I want more paintings to choose from so that I can edit during the installation process

Does a painting determine when it’s finished?

—Yes, I don’t finish a painting, but I recognize when it’s finished. It’s often a surprising moment, especially when it’s completed quickly, as I always assume it will take a long time. Then it’s incredible.

You painted all 34 of the paintings and works on paper in Brussels in a relatively short period of time. Did you work specifically toward this exhibition?

—For quite some time I’ve arranged things so that I no longer have to work toward an exhibition. I always make sure that I have enough playtime. This means that when I paint, I don’t think about any exhibition. You can see that in the eclectic and diverse paintings. With such a wide range, an exhibition concept is impossible anyway. Like a film director who shoots more scenes than

necessary for a movie, I want more paintings to choose from so that I can edit during the installation process. In Brussels, miraculously, I used almost all of the paintings I brought, almost all of them found their place. The result turned out to be greater than the sum of its parts, which I think should always be the goal for a show.

Are the paintings that aren't shown leftovers? Or are they waiting for another opportunity to be displayed?

—My paintings are independent entities. Those not on display in Brussels will be part of a different constellation in the future. Each of them functions as an individual *Bildmaschine* (image machine) and will have a life of its own. I see an exhibition as a large image machine, where all the parts must work together to create visual and emotional energy. The space between the paintings is also important.

What exactly do you mean when you refer to your paintings as "image machines"?

—Metaphorically speaking, they are machines because they work with balance and imbalance. They generate power yet remain in equilibrium. All paintings are "viewing machines" too. As a viewer, you must reactivate them each time. It's interesting that everyone's viewing habits are different. However, as machines, paintings initiate perpetual motion that demands and manipulates attention.

Don't you paint according to your style?

—I never consciously worked on developing a style, nor was I ever interested in doing so. Style is always conventional, ultimately predictable, and often an end in itself. As a painter, you want to enter a realm where something fresh and new happens. I do have a specific visual language, though, one I've developed over the years, with an extensive vocabulary.

You've basically been painting in a similar format for decades—an almost-square, 210 × 190 cm surface. Is there a practical reason for this? Or did it simply suit you and subsequently became your signature format?

—All of my paintings have the same height because I approach each one so differently. If I were to vary the format as well, it would get too confusing when I put them next to each other. I would provide too much visual information. I like having at least this one rule. In fact, the format also suits *me*. When I paint, I can reach every part of the canvas without a ladder or step stool. It suits my movements and my body.

You started painting at a time when there was a big debate about whether painting still had a future.

—Thankfully, that debate is over.

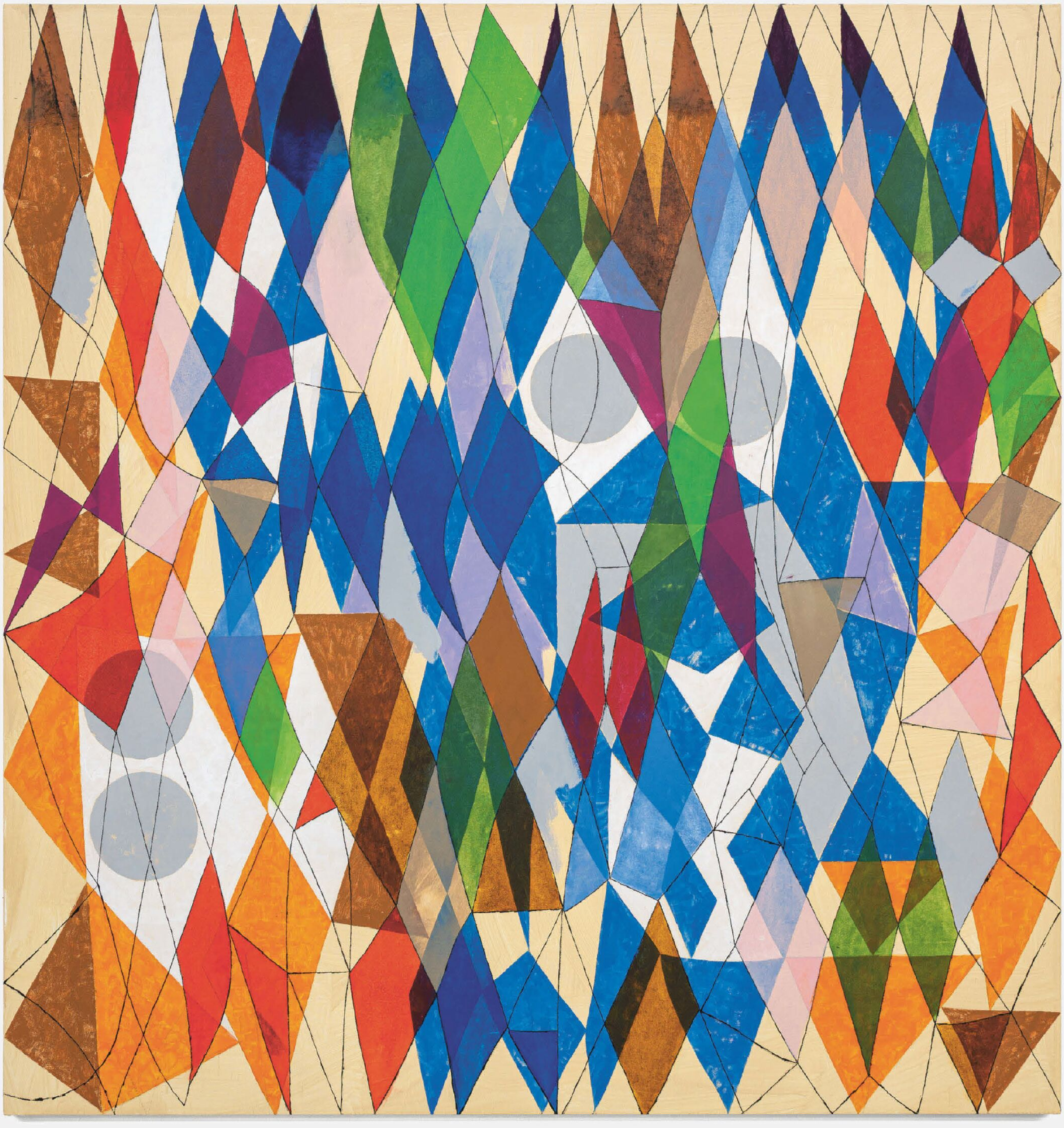
Nevertheless, the old question remains. As a painter, you work with the same basic materials as your predecessors: stretcher frames, paint, canvas, brushes. This is why size matters when it comes to painting. What gives you confidence that painting, with its limited materials, will continue to exist?

—Personally, I don't find that question very interesting. What matters to me is having the freedom to embrace the anachronistic nature of painting. I am interested in the pure joy and challenge of being a painter, being immersed in materials and colors. Despite my creative impatience, I've managed to shape this life for myself, and that's good enough. Yesterday, I was in Bruges and stood in front of a Jan van Eyck portrait that looked as fresh as if it'd been painted yesterday. A chair from the same period looks like a 15th-century chair. But the painting, with its psychology, intensity, and mastery, hangs before us as if it had just been created. Painting can transcend time. That is incredibly powerful. That's why I refer to paintings as "batteries" and "machines." Paintings can have this direct force.

They cannot be translated, because they are not bound to language.

—Exactly. Paintings never have to be translated. That's what makes them so powerful. Then again, my mother was French, and I grew up experiencing a rupture between different concepts of identity. I also realized that there are always multiple perspectives, and that something is always lost in translation. You and I could have our next conversation just about language and its significance for me as a painter. The concept of language is incredibly important to me, in every respect. As a human being and a person, I am shaped by language, by thinking about language. For me, being a painter means asking, "How do I think without language?" Can painting represent that somehow?

DEFY AUGURY, 2025, acrylic, oil, and flashe on linen, 208 × 198 cm
Previous spread: Exhibition view, CHARLINE VON HEYL, at Xavier Hufkens, Brussels, 2025



This comes from someone who claims to have "a complete lack of visual memory."

—I don't carry visual ideas with me. When I stand in front of a white canvas, no image comes to mind that I want to paint. I have to actively go to the canvas and start in with a brush or charcoal. Only then will a picture unfold. As I paint, I evaluate what I'm doing in the moment. Consequently, much of what I create is erased, painted over, transformed. At its core, painting, like everything else, is primarily an act of editing. Of course, some painters envision a scene they want to translate into a painting. But I don't want to translate anything. I want to create a painting.

Does it really matter how you start a painting?

—Not really, but it sets things in motion. One move will lead to the next. The canvas will start to fill up with layers. You can correct and edit everything during and after the process. For me, it's like this: I have the paintings that I call "battery paintings," which I make for myself, to activate the studio's energy. Then, there are paintings where something else emerges and I react to it. It's either satisfying or irritating. That's the interplay between composition and decomposition. At the end of this process, a new painting emerges.

To what extent is painting a solitary process for you, or do you interact with others?

—I don't like having other people around in the studio. I don't like having assistants or anyone else nearby while I paint. In that respect, I'm very solitary. I don't even go to my painter friends' studios anymore. That was important when we were younger, but now we all know what we're doing. It's enough to see each other's finished work, and we're proud and happy for each other. In the studio, however, it's best to be alone.

You're married to Christopher Wool, who is also a painter. Don't you discuss your work with each other? Do you visit each other's studios?

—Funnily enough, I'm never in New York! I'm never in his studio, and he's never in mine. We rarely go to each other's openings either. In Marfa, Texas, however, since our studios are next door to each other, we naturally look at each other's work. It's more like a respectful thumbs-up or thumbs-down kind of thing. Those are the only comments, which are noted, of course, but have no consequences.

With every new painting, though, you both face the same problem: there is no such thing as an empty canvas, to paraphrase Gilles Deleuze—"the painting before painting." Are you not afraid of the white canvas?

—No, but you're touching on an important point. Deleuze talks about clichés. From the moment you start painting, you have to work against clichés, because they are already present on the canvas. Thus, the canvas is never empty. I have reached a point, though, where this question is no longer urgent for me, because my paintings have become so much my own that I no longer care if they resemble anything else or if they might be misunderstood. If anything, the cliché I have to work against is my own. But that doesn't change the accuracy of Deleuze's statement.

> From the moment you start painting, you have to work against clichés because they are already present on the canvas. Thus, the canvas is never empty

Are there practically no more clichés for you?

—Of course, clichés still exist. In fact, new ones are constantly being added. Even the painter in front of a canvas is a cliché. But it doesn't bother me anymore. Besides, since I don't have a visual memory, the question of clichés was never urgent for me. I'll say it again: I can't imagine my own images, nor can I recall those of others. This means that I'm alone in the room when I paint. Still, things do pop up out of nowhere in my paintings, so I guess there's some hidden storage in my mind.

Don't you ever wonder how Van Eyck managed to capture light?

—Yes, I do. But only when I'm standing in front of one of his paintings in a museum. Viewing a painting is an experience, and I'm always grateful for it. However, as soon as I leave the museum, I seem to have forgotten the painting. Yet every visit to a museum sets something in motion. It could be as simple as recognizing a certain shade of ochre that I might not otherwise use.

Do you have ritualized daily routines like Thomas Mann's—writing in the morning, having lunch and a siesta, then writing again in the afternoon?

—I wake up very early nowadays because I don't drink alcohol anymore. From that moment on, I'm fully awake, yet I stay in bed for two hours. I mainly read, and I read very intensely. It's still extremely important to me. Then I slowly make my way to the studio, eat something, and start working. I usually paint until 6pm—I've become quite the daylight worker! Of course, my time in the studio isn't only filled with painting. I also spend it looking, reading, and watching movies on YouTube.

That's not procrastination?

—No, procrastination means putting things off. Though I sometimes do that with tasks, it's different with painting. I distract myself so I can reformulate my thoughts afterwards. It's an act of recalibration, not a waste of time. That's why I don't use social media. At the same time, I do recognize the internet's benefits. YouTube's archives have been opened, and a lot of historic, amateur documentary footage from wartime and the postwar period has been revived and recolored by AI. It feels spookily contemporary. I also watch the daily routines of Japanese office workers and the mating habits of slugs, which are incredible.

And yet, I hardly see any dystopia in your images.

—I carry dystopia within me, which is enough. My paintings—and maybe paintings in general—don't work well when they comment on anything. They exist simply to exist, and to create an alternative world. As a counter-concept, they can function politically because they empower. They can empower viewers, expand interiority, and inspire change by encouraging agency. As I said before, I experienced this firsthand yesterday in front of Van Eyck's work.

But aren't YouTube videos also enablers, except they're algorithmically fed to you? How much of this process is consumption, and how much is self-empowerment?

—It's probably a bit of both. As much as I embrace chance and allow for synchronicity in my life and work, I also consciously work to avoid becoming predictable. I put a lot of thought into ensuring the YouTube videos I watch aren't tailored to me. I rarely follow suggestions. Instead, I enter a new search term. I don't have an Instagram or Facebook account, and I've never "liked" anything. I don't "follow" anyone either. While I welcome open internet archives, it's equally important to me that algorithms don't patronize me. But it feels like a losing battle.

So, you work in two studios, one in Brooklyn and one in Marfa. To what extent have changes in location become routine? Where did you paint the paintings you're showing in Brussels?

—Partly in Brooklyn, partly in Marfa. This is the first time I'm seeing the pictures hanging side by side, in Brussels. It's surprising and exciting for me too!

Have you noticed any differences between the two places? Is it a different way of working?

—I paint a little more in Marfa than in New York. People always assume that Marfa is a refuge where I can express myself away from the world. But the opposite is true. My studio in Brooklyn's Navy Yard is a secret, and I don't let anyone in. In contrast, Marfa is more of an open studio because many people pass through town, and it's easy to organize a visit. If you wanted to organize a studio visit in New York, you can forget about the rest of your day simply because of the traffic. I've completely stopped inviting anyone there.

Since you don't let anyone in, could you describe how your Brooklyn studio is set up?

—It's filled with small triggers, force fields that I install in the room. Books, objects, images, and other things. One of the new paintings is titled *Dala* (2024). The title and shapes in the painting refer to the wooden Dala horse. It's the souvenir that everyone brings home from Sweden. Its shape never changes, and it has an incredibly beautiful bright-red paint job consisting of several layers of lacquer. The lines and ornaments painted on it are always the same. I wanted all of that in this painting. I was interested in the detachment involved in creating it, painting the surface without interest. I wanted to paint like a Dala-horse painter who decorates this object for the thousandth time, in exactly the same manner. Also, consider the incredibly perfect form! The Dala horse was carved for centuries before it took the form of the ideal “little wooden horse,” combined with this highly desirable red lacquer. I wanted to capture that feeling and transfer it to the painting. Of course, the painting itself looks nothing like a Dala horse, but I got the red color exactly right. And you can see the horse in there somewhere. My studio is full of objects like that—objects that make me yearn for something I don’t quite understand.

It’s an almost industrial approach to painting. Is that what you mean when you say “detached”?

—Exactly. Distant, mechanical, formulaic, repetitive. That’s an approach that applies to the *Dala* painting. I use different approaches for other paintings though.

You also mentioned books as opposed to “charged objects” that function as triggers.

—Yes, I have tons of books in both studios. I’m a terrible book hoarder. Sometimes I buy books for their covers. I bought *Paterson* by William Carlos Williams for its cover. I loved it so much that I copied it into the painting of the same name now in the Brussels show. Art books are super important too. I always have stacks of them around me, and I look through them when I need inspiration. If a book actually has the author’s signature, it feels like having a bit of their presence, like an actual artwork. There’s definitely an alchemy between all these things that transforms the studio into my very own laboratory.

In Brussels, you are also showing a series of new lithographs and etchings. More precisely, they are lithographs printed over etchings.

—Yes, that’s correct. But the works were originally conceived as etchings. I reworked them using lithography because the black of the etchings wasn’t black enough. To me though, they are still essentially etchings.

Printing lithography on etchings to enhance the intensity is similar to using both acrylic and oil paints in the same painting—it’s like working against the grain. Oil paint takes a long time to dry, while acrylic paint dries quickly. Rarely do painters use both types of paint in their work.

—With acrylics, I can work quickly. I can paint in layers and edit the image. Oil paint, on the other hand, requires the painter to push the pigment around until it’s in the right place. Ultimately, the painting is full of brushstrokes. But you will hardly ever see a brushstroke in my paintings. When I use oil, it’s always for a reason. I can glaze with oil. I can emphasize and highlight certain colors. For example, I had to use it for the cadmium red in *Dala* because I could never have achieved the same intensity with acrylic. Only oil paint has that rich sheen, much like the Dala horse itself. Sometimes, I use oil under acrylic so the surface will eventually break in a particular way to create a pattern. In other cases, I use oil as glue to hold the pigment in place. Every use of color and material represents something and serves a purpose. You can’t glaze with acrylic either. If I want a transparent surface, I have to use oil paint. In that sense, I’m like a car mechanic who knows exactly which wrench to reach for when they’re under the car.

Would you say that your work is “total painting,” since you seem to draw on the full range of possibilities instead of limiting yourself?

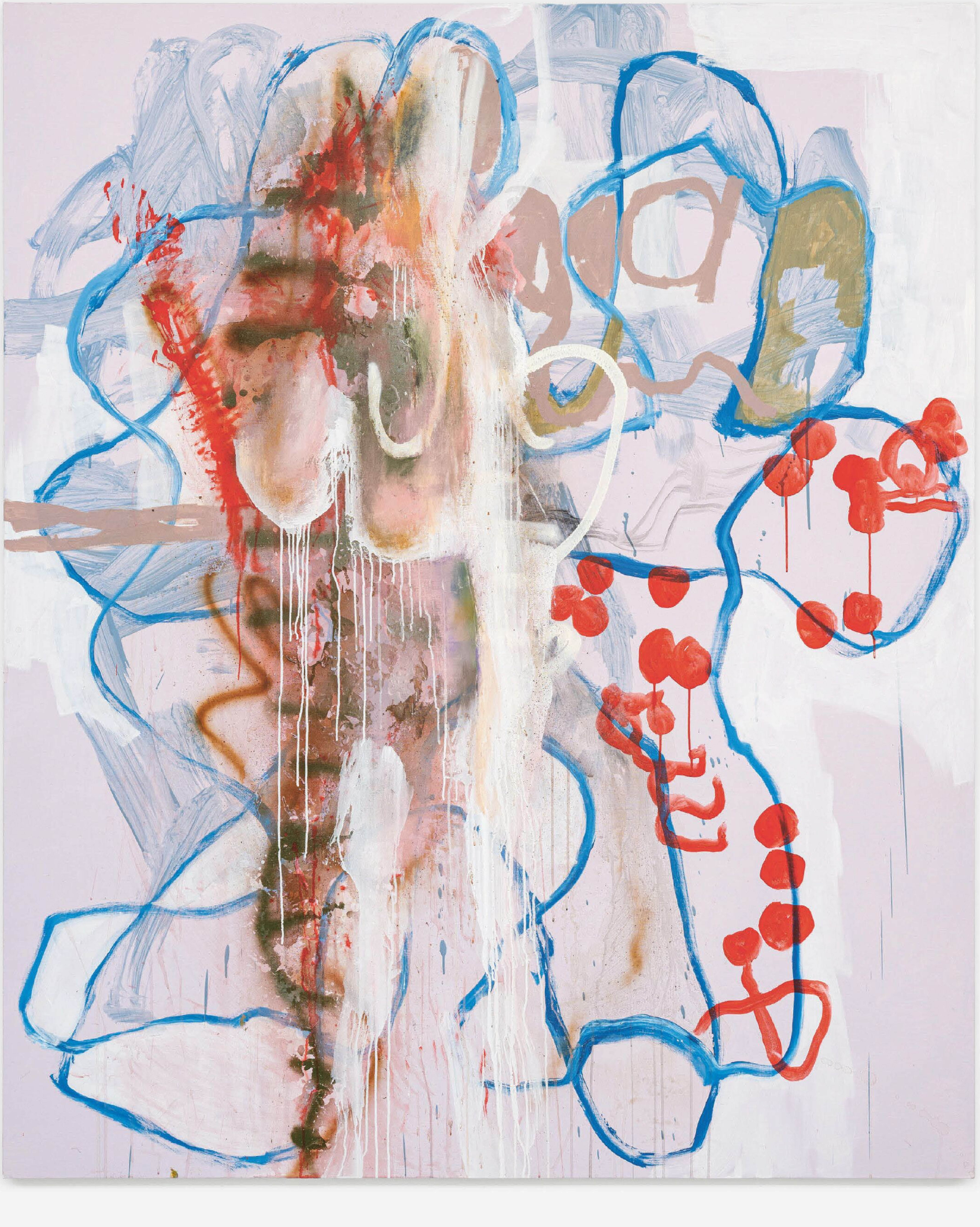
—To me, it’s still just painting. Any means is acceptable to achieve the desired image. Yet I don’t need those many different means. There isn’t a huge variation in my work. On the other hand, there are these fantastic colors with special properties that react differently to light. In my new painting *Zeno* (2024), for instance, the painting transforms from green to orange when viewed from left to right. Technically, that’s only because of the paint. Sometimes I think, “If William Turner had had something like this, he would have freaked out.” He would have loved to experiment with interference colors, but they have only been around for about three decades. Does the use of such colors make my paintings “total”?

You could also limit yourself in your choice of materials and means of expression. Limitations can give rise to strength.

—Yes, but I’m just not that kind of painter. I have set limitations for myself, of course, but I don’t need to express them for their own sake—and they change with each painting.

Charline von Heyl’s solo exhibition at Xavier Hufkens in Brussels closes October 25, 2025.

FOLKLORE, 2024, acrylic and oil on linen, 208 × 173 cm



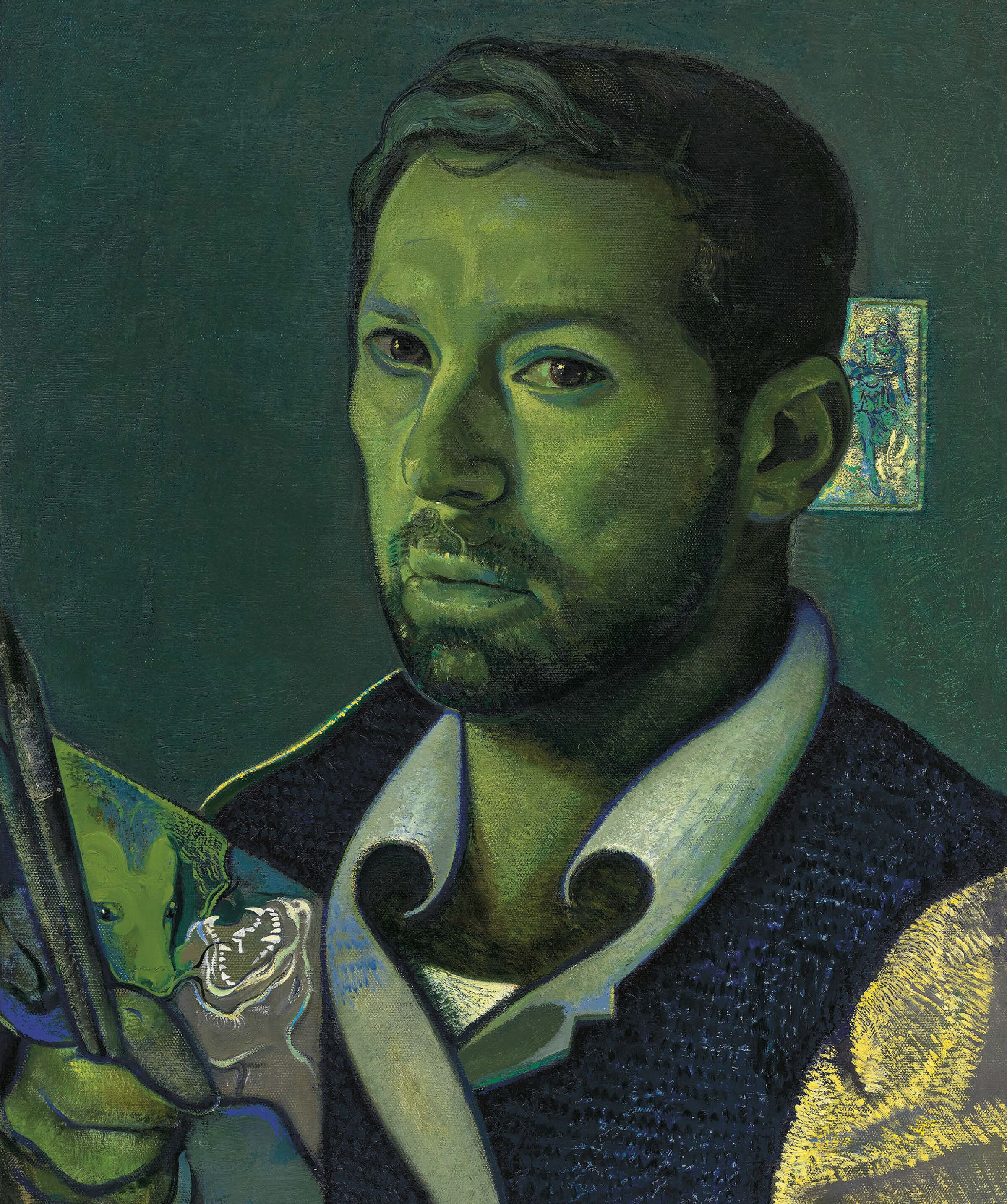
THE TRIALS

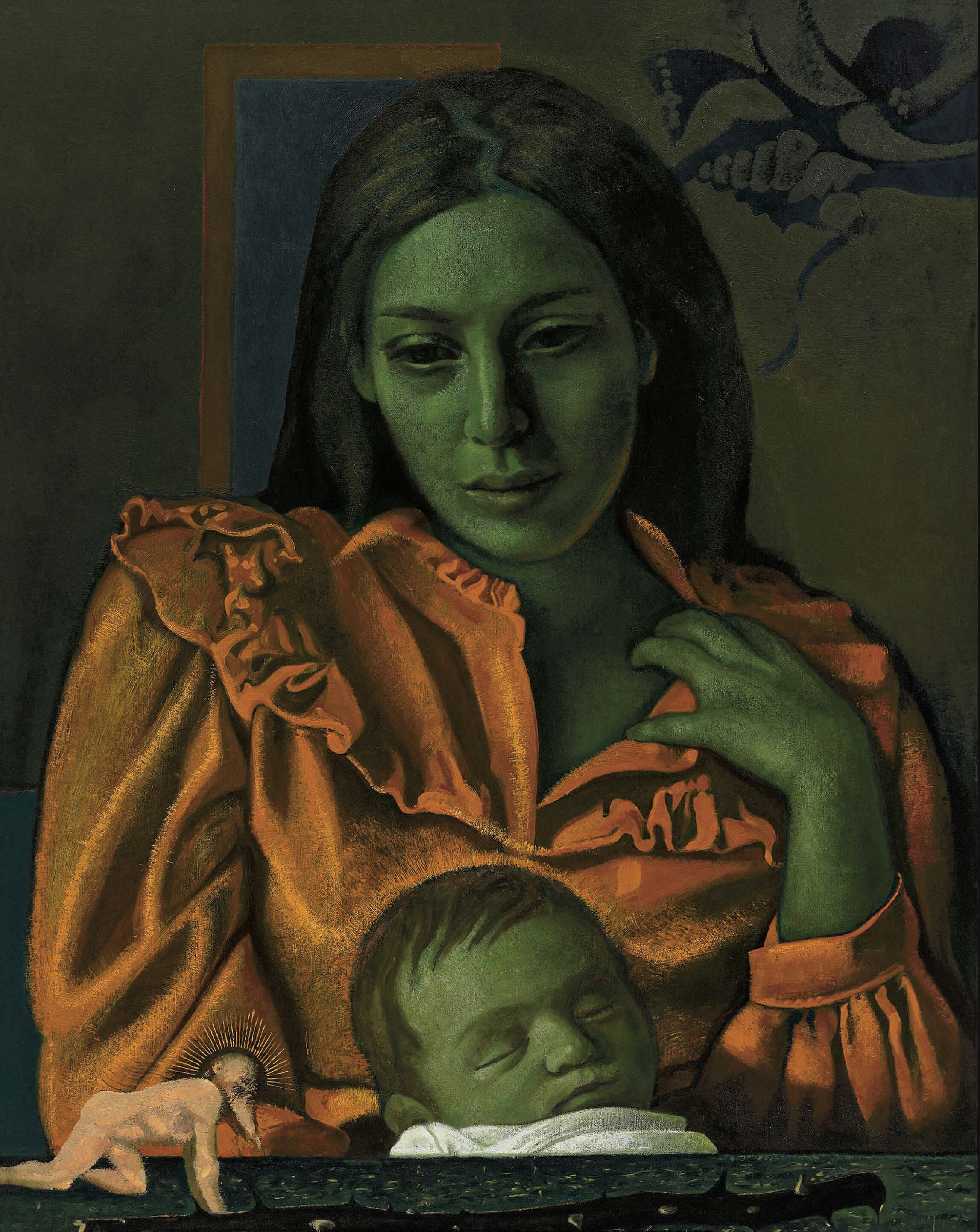
VICTOR

AND TRIUMPHS OF

MAN

Words by
CORNELIUS TITTEL





Having largely turned his back on the modern world, shunning its manifold banalities, VICTOR MAN sees art history as his landscape—one he enters as others might a forest. *Cornelius Tittel* joins the Romanian painter for a weekend in his hometown of Cluj, capturing a myth in the making while trying to understand how this former dropout became the closest thing to an old master we have today

MATERNITY WITH LEGEND, 2024, oil on canvas, 92 × 73 cm

Previous page: SELF WITH SAINT MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL, 2024, oil on canvas, 55 × 46 cm

On May 2, 1890, the young London solicitor Jonathan Harker travels from Vienna via Buda-Pesth to Klausenburg, the largest city in Transylvania, where he spends the night at the Hotel Royale. The next day, he is to continue his journey deep into the Carpathian Mountains for an appointment with a count whose real-estate business he hopes to manage. But now, in Klausenburg, he is plagued by insomnia. Although his bed is comfortable, and although dinner—a dish called paprika chicken—was so good that he wants to bring the recipe back to his fiancée, Mina, he cannot find peace. His thirst seems unquenchable; the carafe of water by his bed offers no relief, and then there is the barking dog constantly breaking the silence beneath his window.

One hundred and thirty-five years and a few weeks later, I, too, have traveled via Vienna to Klausenburg, which is now called Cluj-Napoca, and, no longer part of the Kingdom of Hungary, has become Romania's second-largest city. It is not an undead creature I am visiting, but Victor Man, who is very much alive in all his *dégoût*, a painter who was born in Cluj and still lives here. And that seems to be precisely his problem.

We are in the old town, on our way back from dinner. It's almost midnight, but the streets are still crowded. Fairground techno blares from every other building, a sea of young people spills out onto terraces and beanbag lounges, a sea whose whitecaps shimmer with a toxic orange hue, reflecting the amount of Aperol being consumed here. There seems to be a lot to celebrate in Romania's IT capital, which has long had the highest real-estate prices in the country and is currently hosting an international crypto conference.

And the city's perhaps greatest son? Standing unrecognized at a pedestrian crossing in his Italian linen jacket and Chelsea boots, he gazes with growing despondency at the men of his homeland. As they stand before him with their shorts and shaved necks, he wonders: do they realize that they look like modern slaves? Don't they dream of liberation?

On this first evening, our paths separate in a small square. Victor Man shows me one of the oldest houses in Cluj. Matthias Corvinus, later King of Hungary and Croatia, was born here in 1443. And it's here, in one of these alleys, Man says, the traveler in Bram Stoker's novel must have spent the night. Would he even have heard the dog barking amid all this noise? The painter doubts it and lets his gaze wander over the perfectly renovated façades. Where, he asks, can you still have a clear thought? Where can you develop a sense of poetry and reflection? He liked this place better when it was depressed and run-down. The place where it all began—and where, the next morning, he sends me to the inner-city cemetery, the only place where nothing has changed.

Victor Man was born in 1974. His father is Romanian, a history teacher by training who went on to become the director of various state-owned hotels. His mother comes from a Hungarian family and worked for the literary magazine *Korunk*, which also organized exhibitions in Cluj. Man remembers how she used to take him to the studios of artists she knew, and how he realized his calling early on: to become an artist himself. At 13, he strayed from the path for a few years, discovered heavy metal, and went to parks and morning movie screenings instead of school.

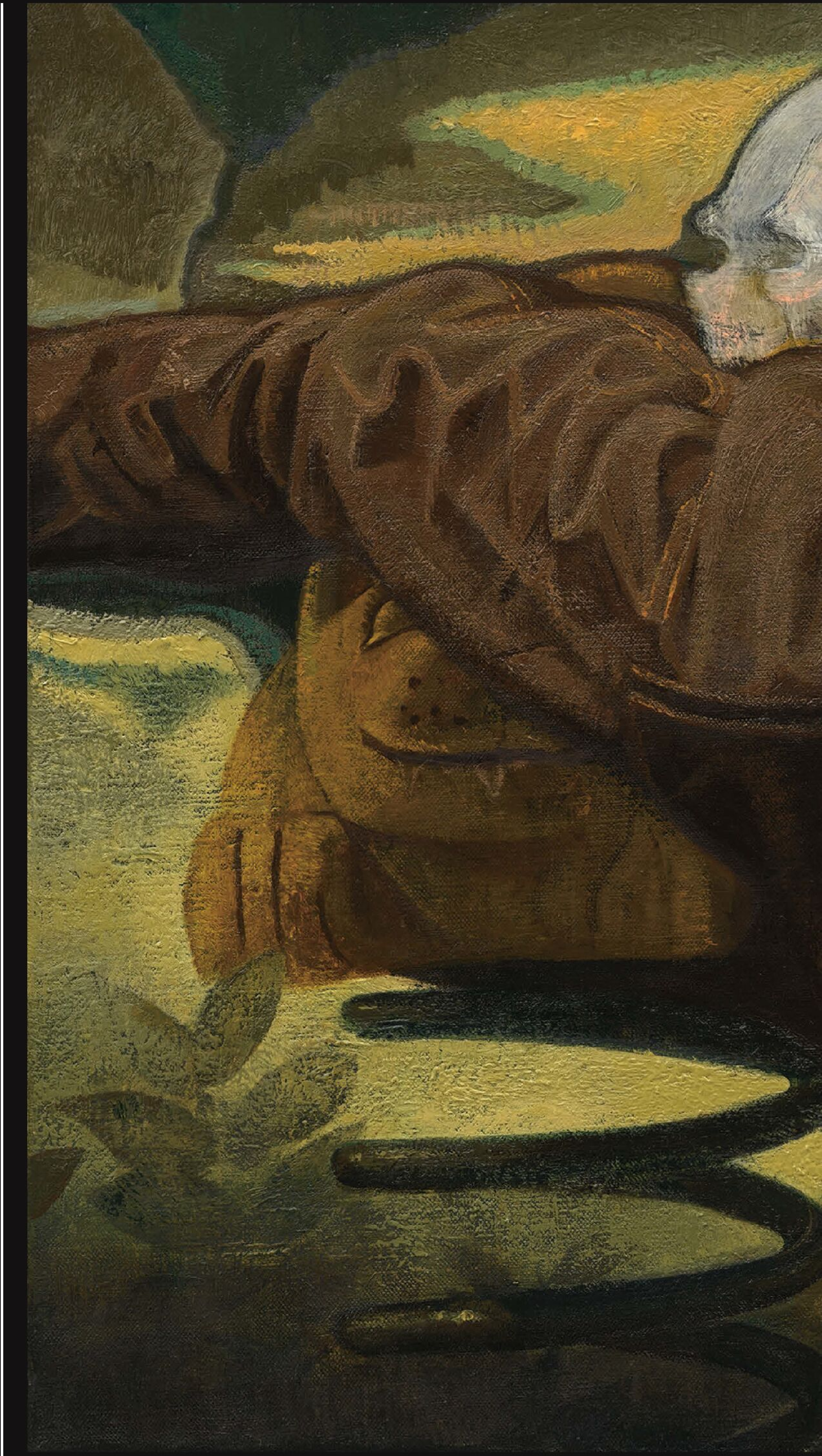
He experienced the 1989 revolution as a 15-year-old on the streets of Cluj, joined demonstrations out of a thirst for adventure, heard shots fired, fled from the police—and on December 25 watched on television how the Ceaușescus, Romania's neo-Stalinist first couple since 1965, were sentenced to death by a military tribunal and executed immediately after.

> One could easily imagine a privately educated bachelor in the 1920s at his modest round Biedermeier table, reading Rilke and Hölderlin by candlelight

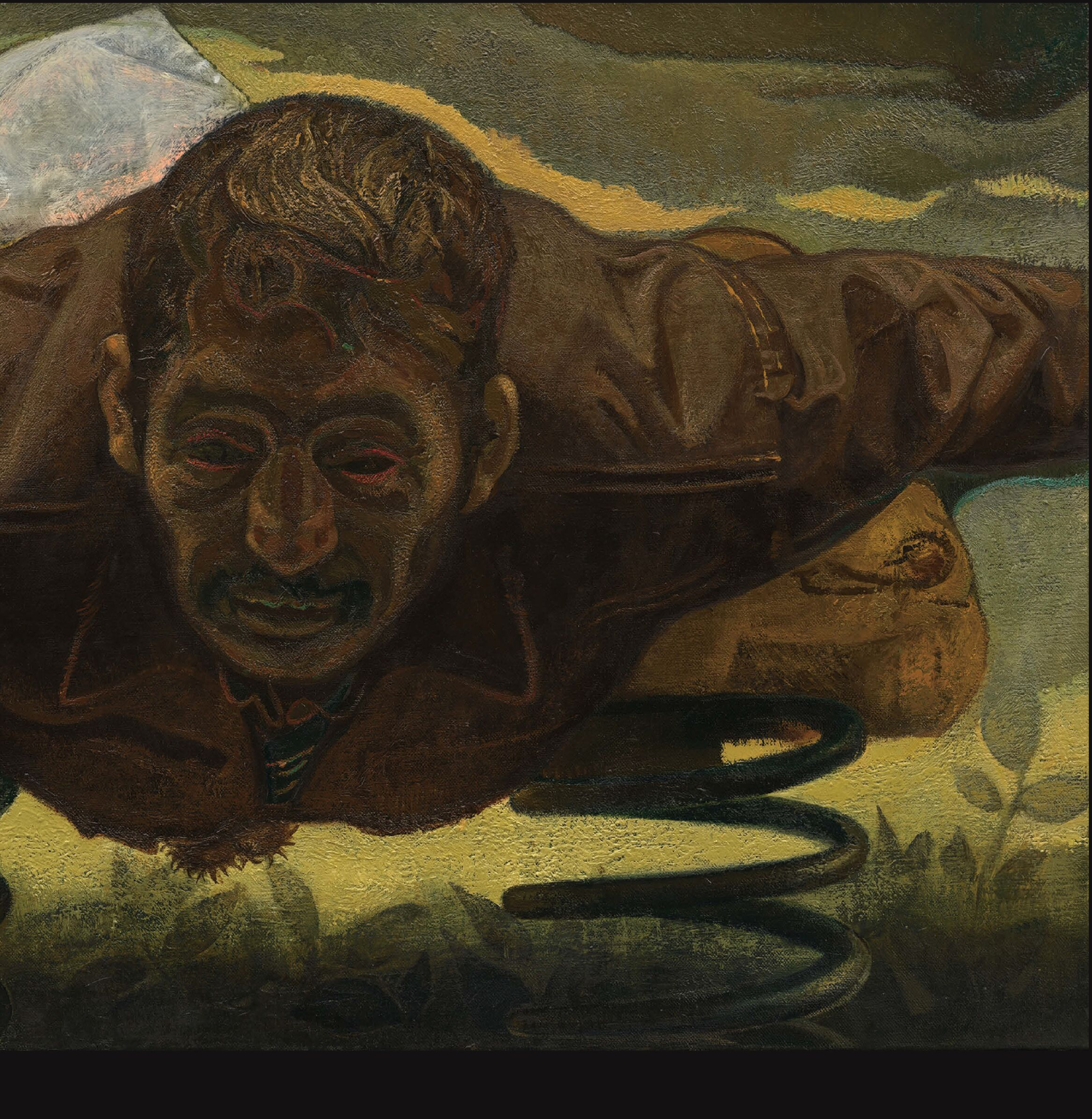
We are sitting in Man's home, in a multi-unit villa at the foot of a park that rises above the old town and is crowned by a brutalist hotel called Belvedere. He lives on the top floor, his heavily pregnant partner, Alexandra, and their son have the apartment below. This spatial separation allows him to maintain a certain degree of loneliness that is fundamental to his thinking and painting, here as everywhere else. The rooms exude a slightly monastic charm. One could easily imagine a privately educated bachelor in the 1920s at his modest round Biedermeier table, reading Rilke and Hölderlin by candlelight, and looking forward to the latest poetry collection by Gottfried Benn, which he would pick up at the bookstore the very next day.

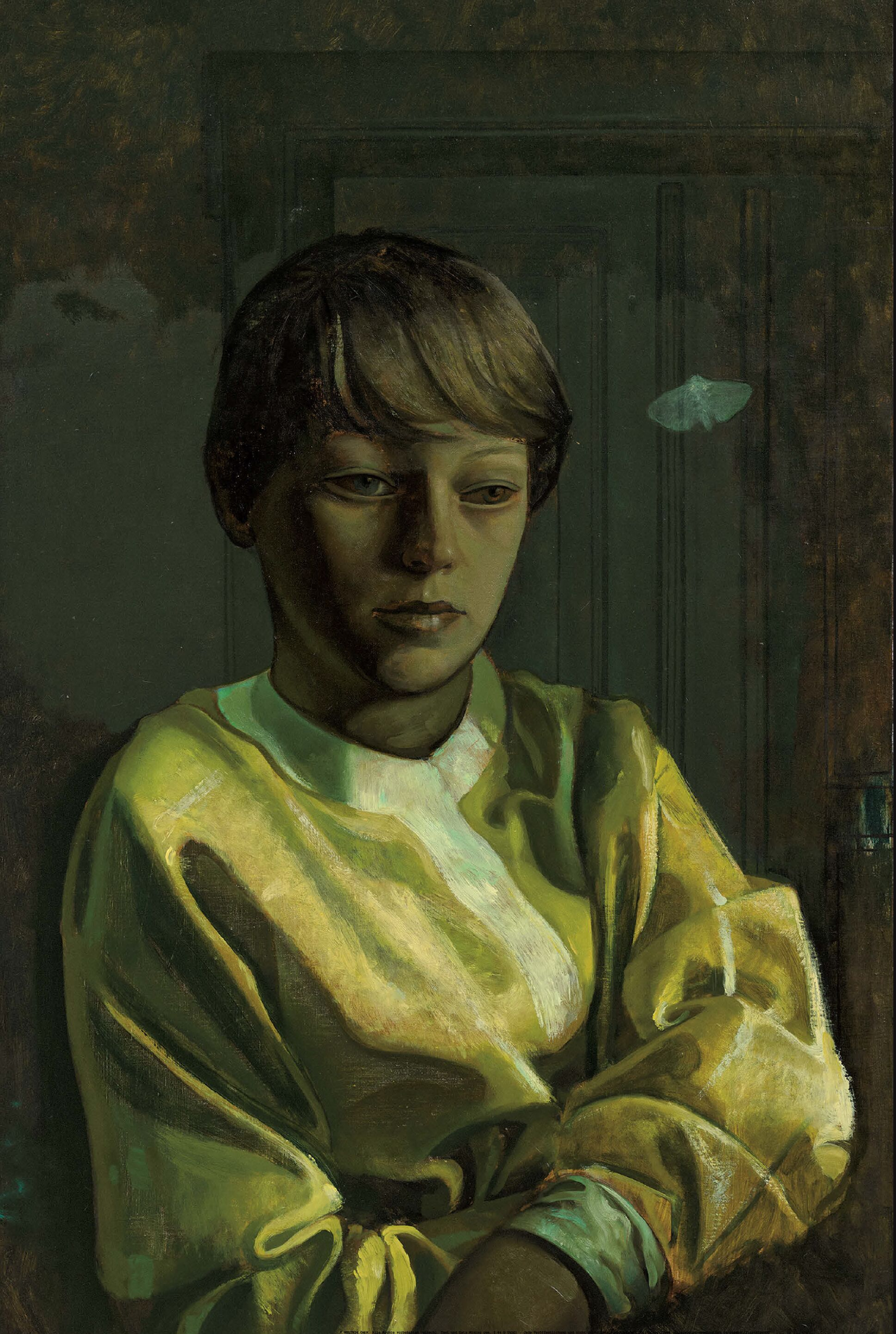
On the walls, early Romanian modernism; on the shelves, catalogues of Renaissance painting and very thin French books on Gauguin and El Greco, so old that Man has sewn their spines back together himself with needle and thread.

Man makes coffee, but he has to fetch my milk from the floor below. I ask how the collapse of communism affected him and his family. Hardly at all, he says, except that, in 1988 and 1989, the police would still pick him up at home and take him to school, but from 1990 onwards no one was interested in his absences anymore. And yet, the political shift may have had one consequence that changed everything. The documentary about Vincent van Gogh that 16-year-old Man saw on television in 1990 probably would not have been broadcast a year



COUNCIL OF THE RATS, 2025
Oil on canvas, 70 × 110 cm





UNTITLED, 2013, oil on canvas, 100 × 67 cm earlier—Van Gogh withdrew from society too radically, followed his vision too obstinately. The film became a turning point in Victor Man's life: before, he didn't go to school because he was a dropout; after, he didn't go to school because he was a painter.

The young man found his life's meaning, a feeling that would never leave him again. He put his heavy-metal cassettes in a drawer and turned his childhood bedroom into a studio. He looked up the city's most famous painter in the phone book. Gábor Miklóssy answered—and Man began working for him, stretching his canvases and running errands. He was repeatedly expelled from school—in the end, he attended seven different ones. But none of this seemed to bother him. He knew that as a painter, he had only one responsibility: to cultivate his talent.

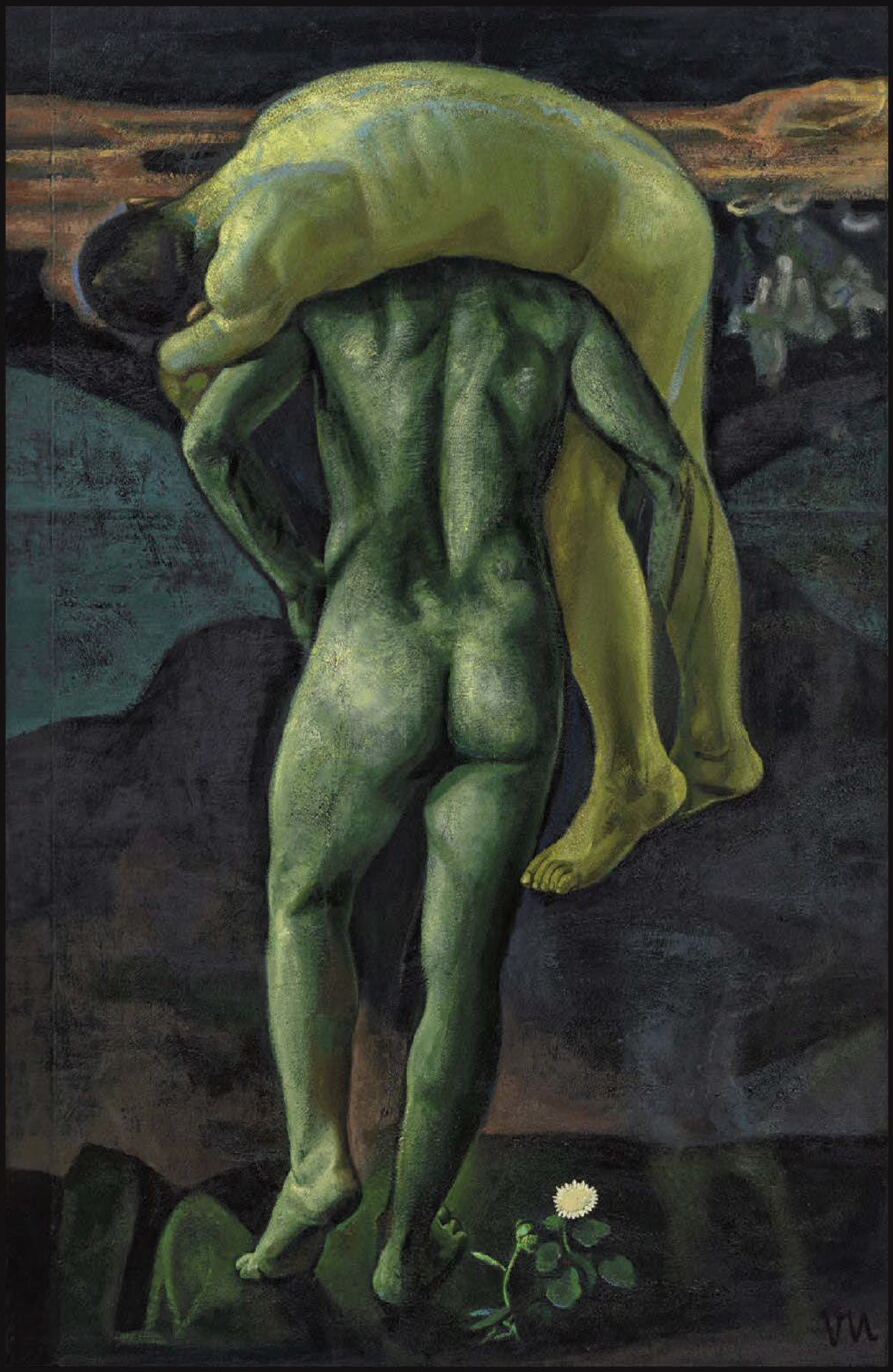
At 16, he looked up the city's most famous painter in the phone book. Gábor Miklóssy answered—and Man began working for him

We look through the double doors and into an earth-toned room where an easel stands next to a table with tubes of paint. The picture has been turned around, as have the works stacked against the wall. Man watches me as I consider asking him to show the work on the easel. He seems to sense my uncertainty but decides to ignore it, keeping his gaze fixed on me. His smile, as far as I can read it, signals that I simply haven't earned the right to see one of his new paintings yet. And so we sit there in silence for a moment—me pondering the idea that it is not only his paintings of which he likes to be in control.

Victor Man has given interviews only two or three times in his life, and every one he has regretted. Knowing he was famously press-shy (and also averse to being photographed), I decided to not even ask if I could tape our conversations—instead taking notes and promising not to quote him directly.

I break the silence by remarking that a mutual friend described him as a kind of secret agent who not only speaks four languages fluently and constantly changes his place of residence but also keeps his loyalties vague and is fundamentally suspicious of other people's motives. His energy, I suggest, is more like that of an *infracteur*, reminding me of that famous Degas quote, "A painting is something that requires as much trickery, malice, and vice as the perpetration of a crime."

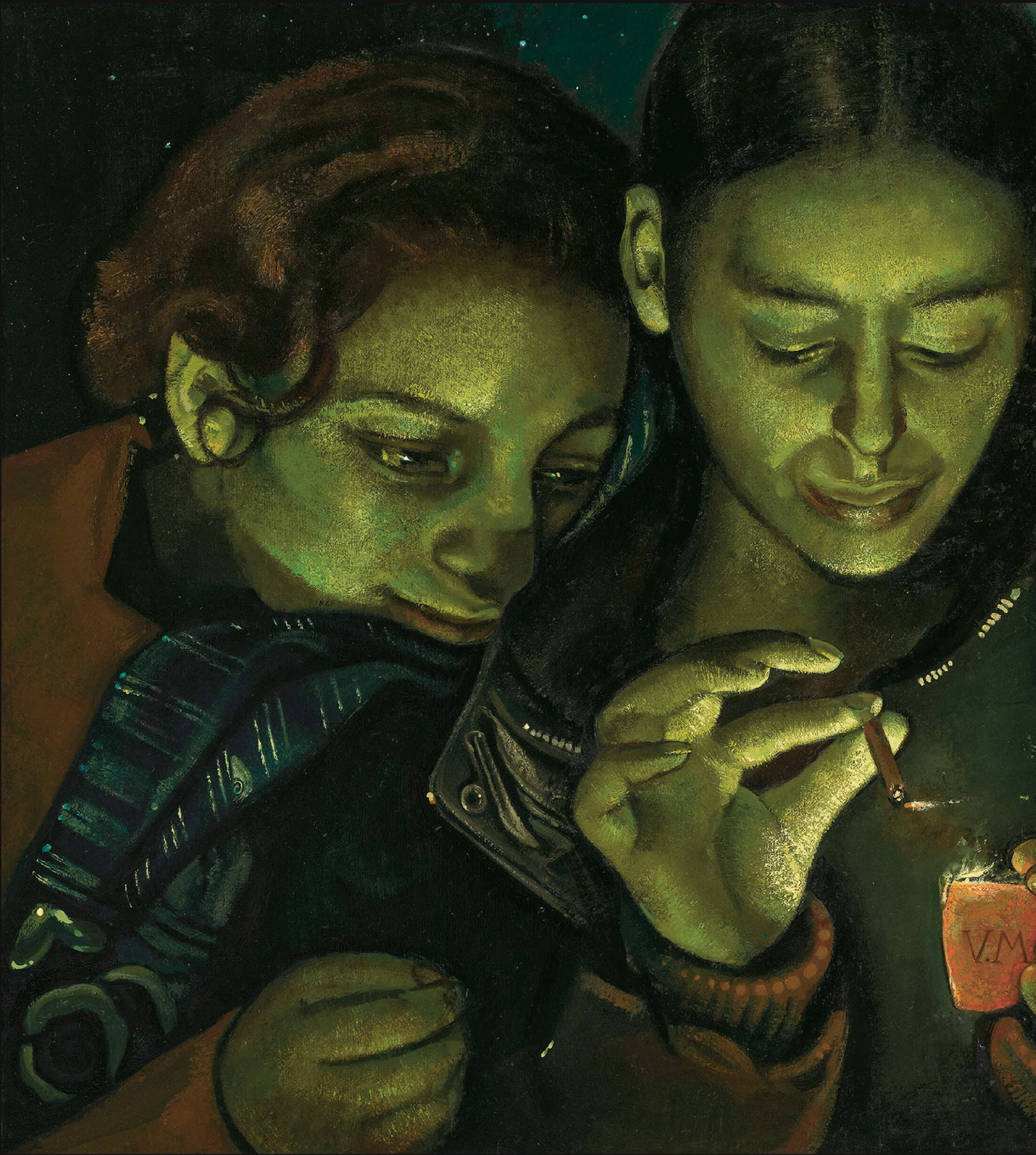
To stay with the metaphor: if Man's paintings now resemble perfect crimes, how did this adolescent Van Gogh fan and truant become one of our times' great master criminals, in Degas's purest sense? It is a long story full of detours, both in- and outside his work, one he will tell me this evening. It is a story that takes our young hero first to Israel and then back to Cluj, where he briefly rises to become the poster boy of a new Romanian art boom, only to escape it in Rome, following in the footsteps of Balthus.



NOAPTE TRANSFIGURATĂ, 2020–25
Oil on canvas, 201 × 131 cm

Following spread: TITIRITEROS, 2023
Oil on cardboard, 60 × 84 cm

Victor Man was 22 years old when he finally finished school and enrolled at the Academy of Visual Arts in Cluj. He created large-format, almost photorealistic paintings that evinced the influence of David Salle, Franz Gertsch, and Eric Fischl. But instead of settling down at the academy, Man married his Romanian-Israeli girlfriend, who soon gave birth to his first child. While visiting his wife's family in Jerusalem, he discovered a catalogue of Israel Hershberg in the library of a museum. Fascinated by the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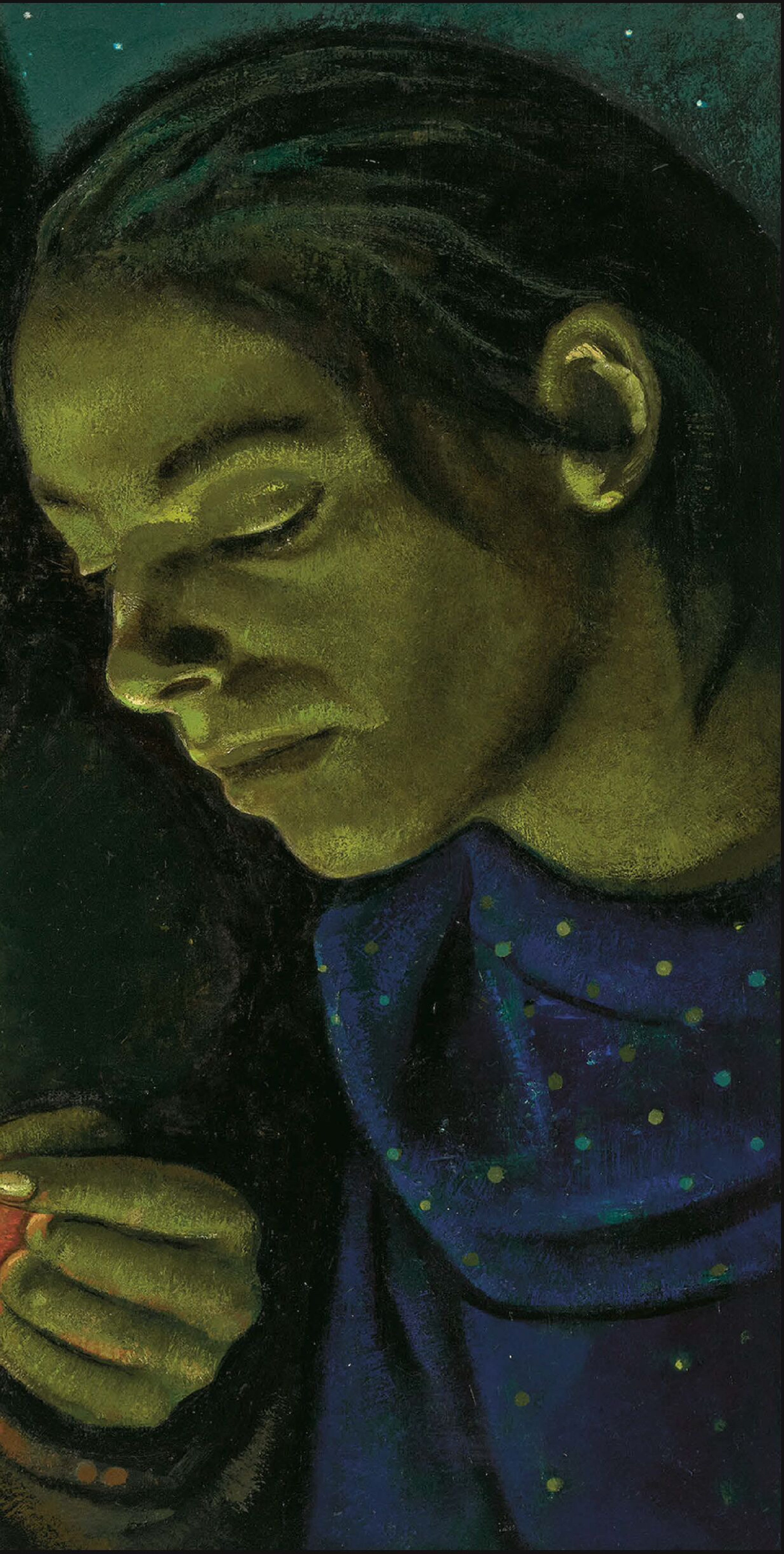


painter's small-format still lifes and landscapes, he looked up his number and called—without realizing that Hershberg ran a private art academy named the Jerusalem Studio School.

Hershberg was so impressed by the young Man that he offered him a scholarship, and so he and his partner decided—on the spur of the moment—to move to Jerusalem.

It seems to have been a rather traumatic episode for everyone involved. First and foremost, Man's relationship with his father-in-law deteriorated. The latter had plans for his son-in-law and tried to talk him into getting a job in Israel's growing IT industry. After all, he could still paint in the evenings, for tourists, to supplement the household budget—maybe portraits of people and scenes of Jerusalem's Old City? Instead, Man found a Tel Aviv gallerist who would pay him a monthly stipend in exchange for his sketches.

> While Man's formats were getting smaller, the same cannot be said of his personal woes

From Hershberg, he learned what it means to be an observational painter (even if he disagreed with his teacher declaring that Cézanne's landscapes were no good because birds can't fly through them). While Man's formats were getting smaller, the same cannot be said of his personal woes, the climax of which came in the form of a shouting match with a judge, who not only declined to grant him a divorce but, much to Man's dismay, imposed a travel ban on the young artist.

Man moved into the Monastère Sainte-Claire in Jerusalem. In exchange for a rent reduction, he scrubbed the church floor and was allowed to paint in the garden, which was otherwise only accessible to the nuns. When, after a full year, he was finally allowed to leave the country, he traveled to Rome with a new girlfriend, only to return to Jerusalem shortly afterwards—a brief second shot at a relationship with his now ex-wife.

In 2004, he came back to his hometown, alone, now divorcing his wife for good, as she refused to join him in Cluj. While completing his degree at the academy and preparing his first solo exhibitions in Amsterdam and the northern Italian town of Valdagno, he sensed that an artist-run exhibition space would be hugely beneficial to Cluj's emerging art scene. And so, in 2005, Adrian Ghenie persuaded a local businessman to finance a space, which, on Man's suggestion, would be directed by his kindergarten friend Mihai Pop. Plan B, the gallery that would become synonymous with the international hype surrounding the so-called School of Cluj, made its debut that same year—with a Victor Man solo exhibition fittingly titled *Perfect Crime*.

Twenty years later, it is difficult to talk to the artist about this period. His show, consisting of 15 wall drawings, a black painting with the word "*Auguri*," and a fireplace covered in black pigment, was reviewed in *Art in America*, and in the years that followed, hardly a European art magazine failed to send reporters to the exotic hotspot of Cluj. But as positive as the sudden interest would be for Man's career, the articles mostly perpetuated truisms of a thoroughly traumatized country that inspired its sensitive star artists to peak performance. Unsurprisingly, Man rejects being pigeonholed in a school whose supposed "members" he is connected to merely by living in the same city and having attended the same academy.

I ask him whether I should talk to old companions about him and this time. That, he says, would be too much of a cliché. He would rather give me the contact details of his ex-girlfriends—what they have to say would probably be less predictable than the stories of his old peers.

It's late again on the second evening. We ate the same as last night, a pork chop for me, a crepe filled with peppers and minced meat for him. Perhaps, I think as he gets the check, it's not the stories from the past that annoy him. Perhaps it's his early works themselves, the ones that first made him famous. At Plan B, in the Romanian pavilion at the Venice Biennale, in his first exhibition with Barbara Gladstone in New York: his early paintings are all pictures of pictures, as Barry Schwabsky put it in an essay at the time. The templates came from magazines or films, and when taken out of context, the motifs create a ghostly suspense similar to the kind that Luc Tuymans likes to build—except Man expanded the concept of painting and staged his own in installations with photos, wall drawings, and sculptural elements.

Outside, on a futile search for a bar he *doesn't* deem terrible, Man admits that he only found what he was looking for in his late 30s. What suddenly shone had only sparkled before—his *perfect crime* may not have been that perfect after all.

The next day, my last in Cluj, I am supposed to get a rental car. Man wants to take a trip to the countryside, just for his guest, but he himself neither has a car nor drives. The destination is Varjúvár, the country house of Károly Kós, a Hungarian architect who also built the pavilion of the Cluj academy. Since I don't want to go all the way back to the airport first—not yet anyway—I call a handful of companies until I find one who promises to bring a car to Man's address. But just as I ring the doorbell, ready for our excursion, the car-rental company cancels.

Instead, the painting on the easel no longer has its back turned to me—and we sit down, in front of his latest work, to go back once more to the moment when Man became the painter he is today.

Council of the Rats, as he intends to title the painting, shows a man with outstretched arms, seemingly flying, from a slightly low angle—at least until you see the carved wooden blocks and metal spirals holding him under his armpits. His eyelids are blood red, his face dark and furrowed against the backlight of the yellow sky.

And once again, Man sits next to me, watching me—visibly pleased that even now, a day later, the view of the easel still puzzles me. "What and who am I looking at here?" I ask after a while, first admiring the folds of the man's jacket, then the white cloth on his right shoulder that shimmers pink.

On a futile search for a bar he *doesn't* deem terrible, Man admits he only found what he was looking for in his late 30s

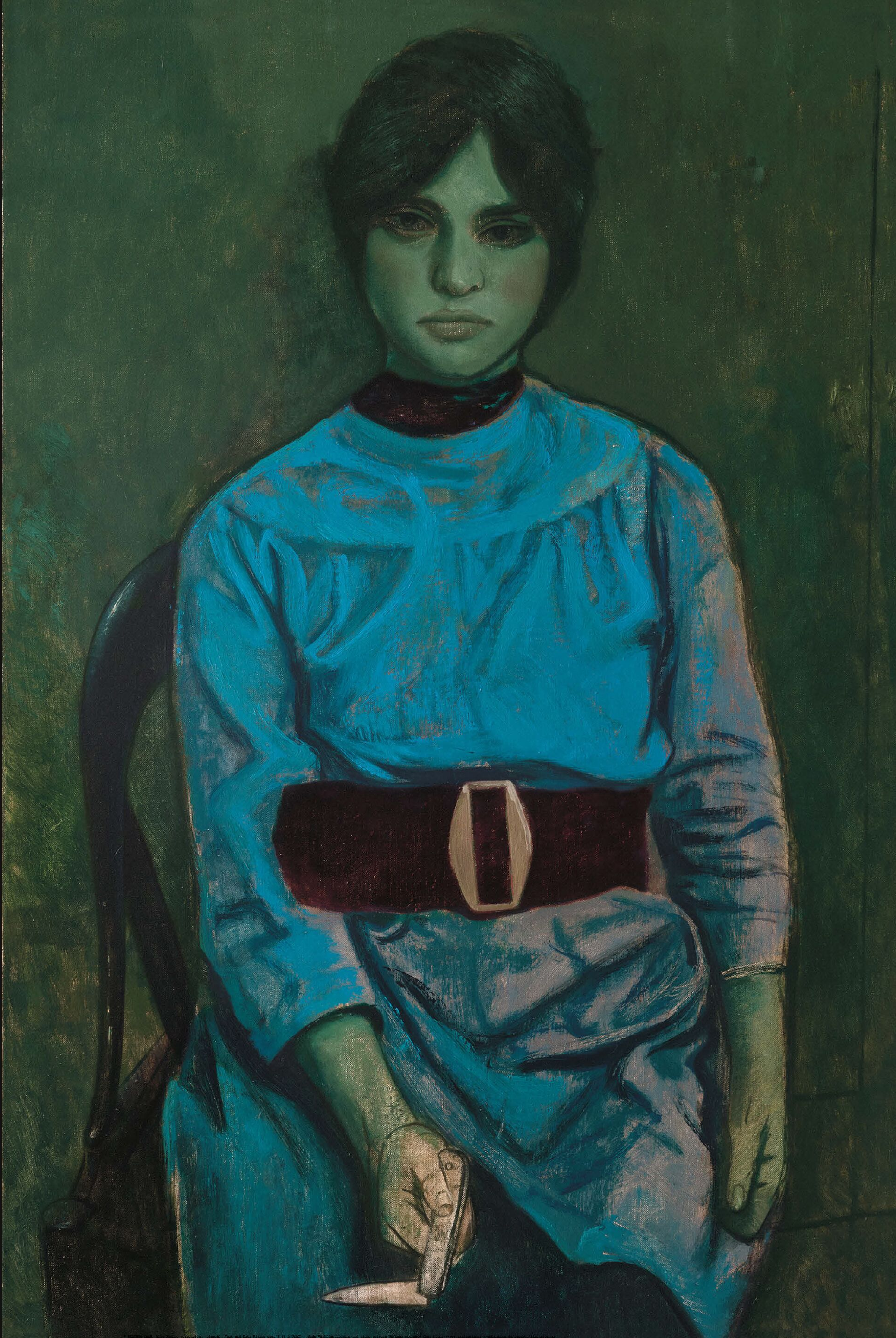
The flying man, he says, is a gypsy, the crazy head of a family of beggars. The spirals and wooden blocks are swing toys in a playground where he met the man one evening. And the incredible, otherworldly yellow of the sky, to which nothing seems to compare? That, he says, is not yellow, but a secret.

When exactly, I ask, did he find what he was looking for? And how did that young artist who experimented with paintings, photos, and sculptures as spatial collages, who was interviewed by Hans Ulrich Obrist and would most probably be half-forgotten today, become the closest thing we have to an old master?

Man dates the break to 2012, a time when he was traveling extensively and didn't have access to his studio in Cluj. The collage moved into the rectangle, the small-format painting became the sole focus. And instead of relying on his archive, he began to work with models, painting his then-girlfriend as the androgynous Stephen Dedalus from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

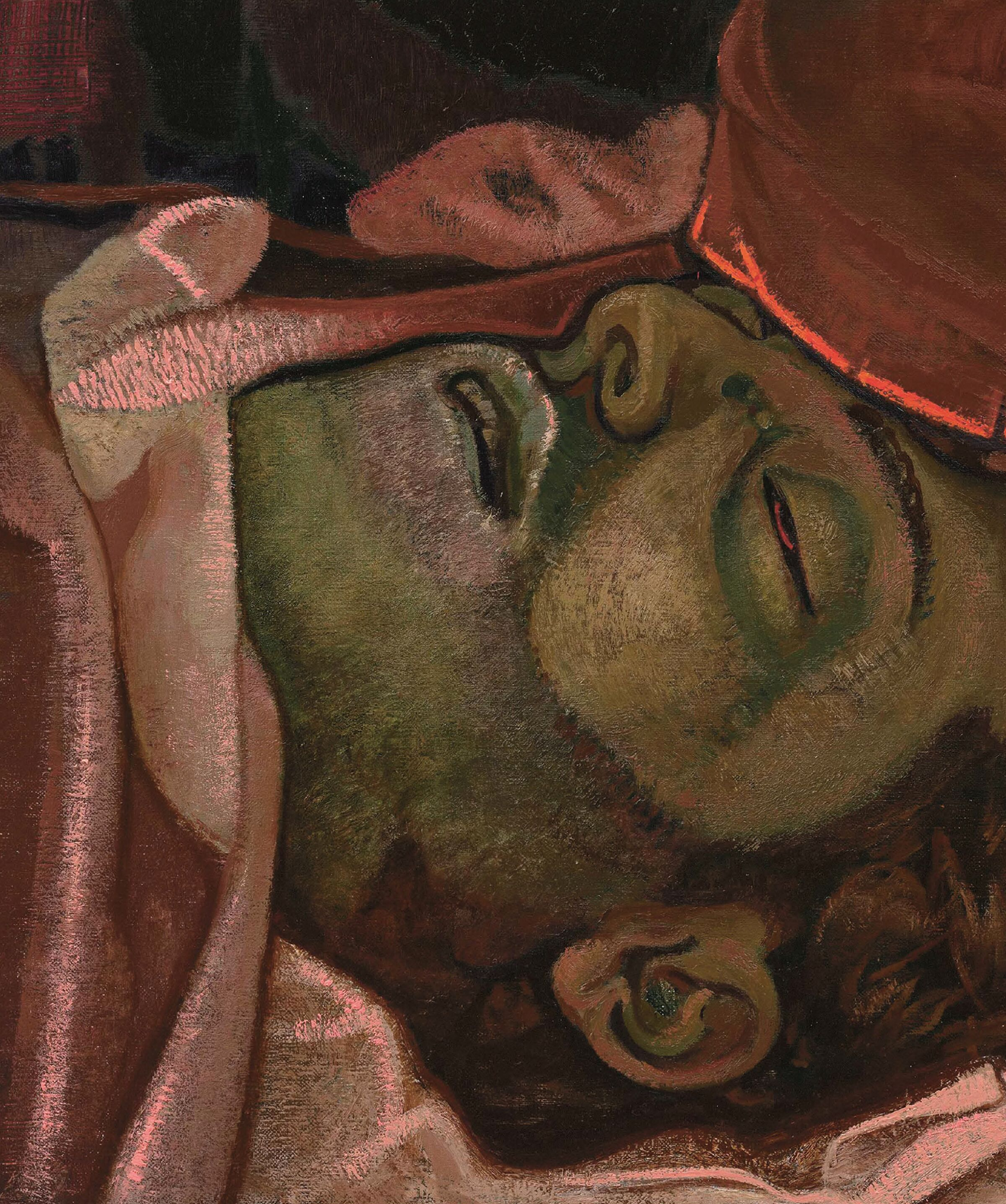
If before he'd been stripping his paintings of meaning, cultivating a detached, deadpan style, now he was freeing himself of any limitations a supposedly progressive painting discourse might have imposed on him. Instead, he imbued his new portraits with so much feeling that they left the viewer no other choice but to feel as well.

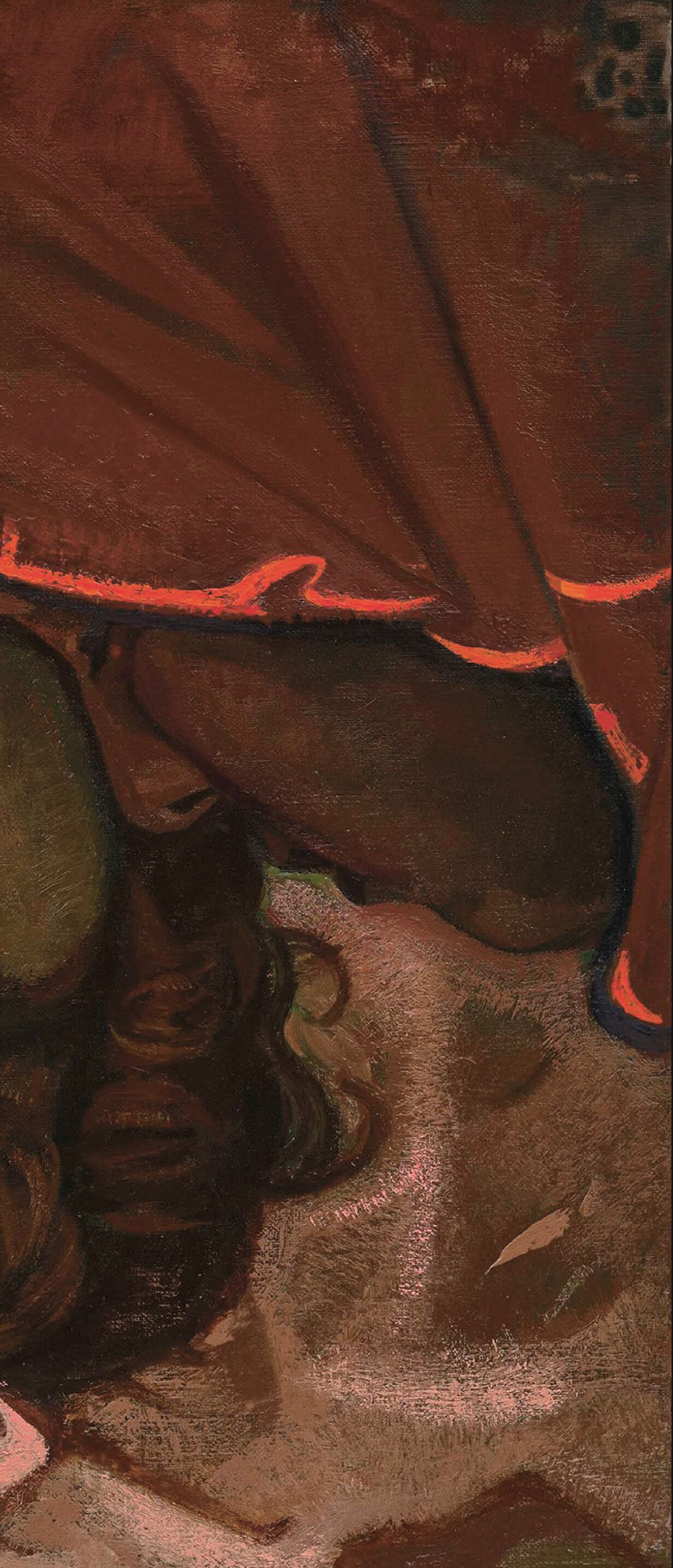
He says those were some of the happiest times of his life, as a guest at the Villa Medici in Rome, where the director, Éric



K, 2014, oil on canvas, 60 × 40 cm

Following spread: PIETAS (FLOWER OF GAZA), 2025, oil on canvas, 40 × 50 cm





de Chassey, invited him to work for a few months in 2013 in a space that turned out to be Balthus's former studio. Man takes a Velázquez book from his shelf and flicks to a picture of the villa's garden. I've seen it at the Prado. It shows the gate to the rooms, boarded up with wooden planks, where 400 years after Velázquez, Balthus would paint his famous *Nu de Profile* (1975), the girl with the orange towel—and where, another 50 years later, our hero started the work that now could be considered *mature Man*. This is where he created the first of his group of so-called *Chandler* paintings, images of a seated, obviously female figure whose head is abruptly cut off at the edge of the picture and rests on her lap.

In Rome the postmodern painter became a pre-modern one, one whom curators can place in dialogue with the Renaissance masters without having to blush

Here, above the eternal city, which laid its entire history of painting at his feet, Man sharpened his nocturnal palette of exquisite blues and greens, before which a small yellow bow around the woman's neck would detonate like an explosion in slow motion—a sensation outside of time that gives the viewer the sense they have never seen a bow before, or even yellow, for that matter.

As obvious as it is that Man has closely studied the heroes of early modernism, in Rome the postmodern painter became a pre-modern one, one whom curators, as they recently did at Frankfurt's Städel Museum, can place in dialogue with the Renaissance masters without having to blush.

Velázquez–Balthus–Man: a Spaniard, a Frenchman, and a Romanian, their work connected through the centuries by one shared place. Even if Victor Man is too modest to count himself among this trio, it is a chord that does not sound too off for someone who sees art history as his landscape, a landscape he enters as others might a forest.

So it's fitting that we're going to the countryside after all. Victor mentions that his girlfriend's mother's old Renault is parked in front of his house, and that the key is downstairs. I ask him why he didn't say so right away, as it would have saved me the trouble of calling car-rental companies. He replies that I just never asked and suggests that the car might be too uncomfortable and not safe enough.

As he sits next to me a short time later and apologizes for the ugliness of his hometown's seemingly endless post-socialist suburbs, as he sinks deeper into his seat with every kilometer and visibly suffers from all the banality and ordinariness, it becomes clear to me that Man never *actually* goes out into nature, simply because the journey alone is already an imposition. Turning away from the world seems to be an almost physical necessity for him, but it can only succeed where his books and paints are.

> It's almost a bit too much for me. Some details alone would be reason enough to visit the museums where they will one day hang

No wonder he hasn't driven down this arterial road in ages. A pizzeria we pass he remembers as being on the edge of town, though today it lies in the middle of sprawling new housing developments. He has never visited the house of the famous architect either. And when we finally leave the suburbs behind and get out of the car somewhere in a hilly landscape, neither of us really knows what we're doing here. With its towers reminiscent of Tommi Ungerer's *The Three Robbers*, Kós's so-called Crow Castle looks like a fortress shrunk to the size of a single-family home. It is fenced in, all the windows closed. We briefly try to go for a walk in the blazing sun but soon give up due to a lack of adequate headgear. And so we drive back. Man wants to go to the studio, he says. The painting on the easel is still missing a chestnut.

Four weeks later, I will see it in his Berlin storage. To be precise, there are two chestnuts, still in their prickly shells, now hanging beneath the jacket of the crazy Roma. Victor Man thinks they hint at testicles, but not too much. He has meanwhile become a father for the fifth time; his girlfriend and baby are doing well in Cluj, and now he is making the final preparations for his show at David Zwirner, which will open in mid-September. He has brought all his works here so that they can be photographed and framed before going to London.

I had expected to see just a few, but now the entire exhibition is in front of me, leaning against the wall, painting after painting, more than two years' work. There are pictures of motherhood: one shows his girlfriend breastfeeding, another with their son on her lap. Kneeling on the floor in front of them, I wonder which male artist after Picasso still painted pictures of motherhood. And only then do I see the specter of Man floating in the corner of one painting, and a small naked figure with a halo crawling on all fours at the bottom of the other. There are more portraits of women: a young half-naked Roma girl looking into a hand mirror and seeing Death in it, and another holding a bat almost tenderly. There are the self-portraits: two show the painter reaching his hand out to a skeleton. And then there is not only Death, but an actual dead man: a Palestinian victim of the war, laid out, a grieving woman bent over him.

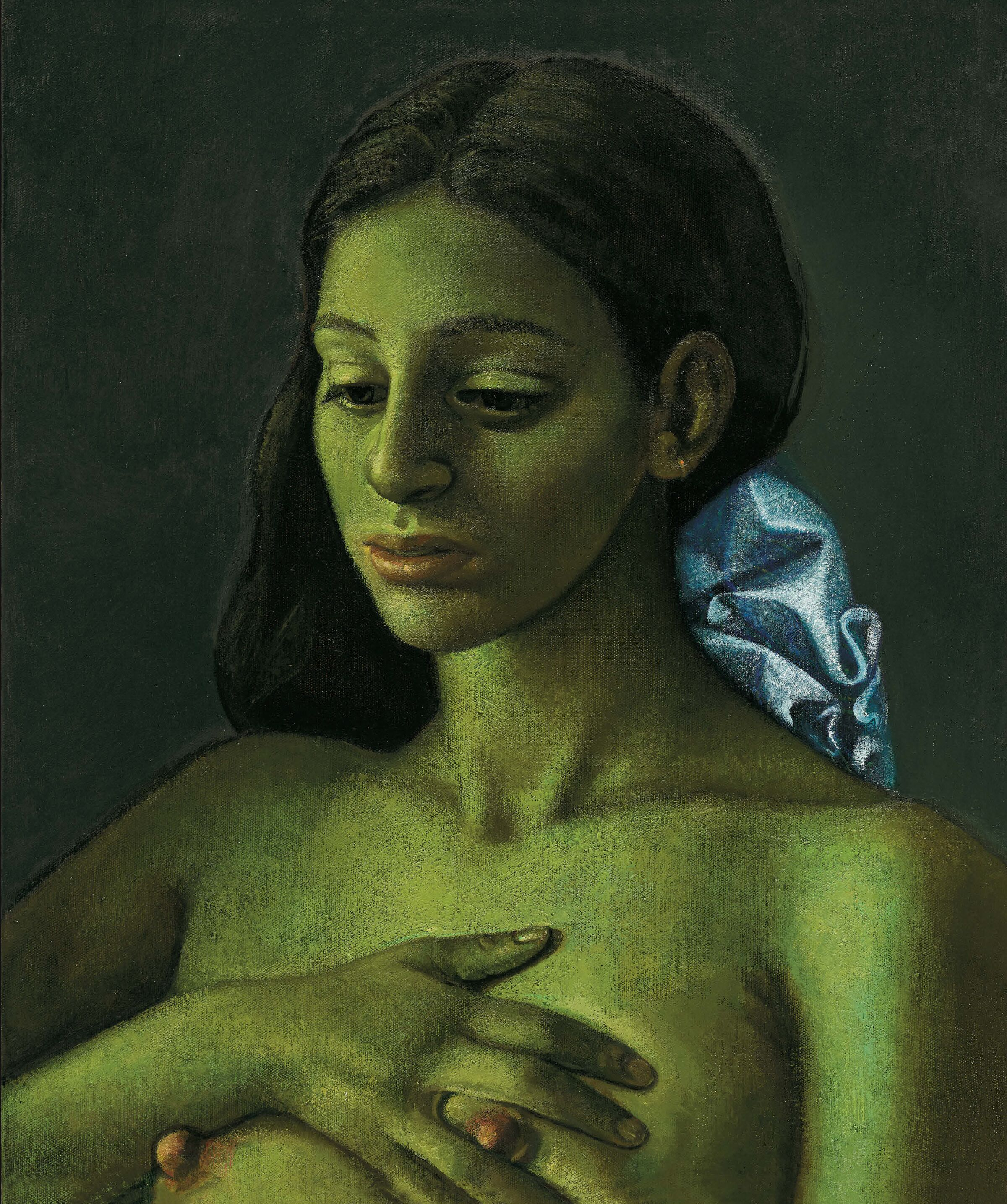
Birth, Eros, religion, death. It's all in one room, almost a bit too much. And not because the postmodern agnostic in me scoffs at the reactionary striving for transcendence. It's too much for me because some details in these paintings alone would be reason enough to visit the museums where they will one day hang. The incredible ochre of the top in *Maternity with Legend* (2024); the light falling on the white collar in *Untitled (From Wounds and Starry Dreams)* (2022); the red cloth woven into the braid of *Girl with a Bat* (2024).

Eternal night may have fallen over Victor Man's world, but it is thoroughly illuminating moments like these that otherwise draw me to Berlin's Gemäldegalerie or the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna; to the curtain in Vermeer's *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window* (c. 1657–59) or the silk veil in Bellini's *Lady at Her Toilet* (1515).

Later, after driving Man home, I step closer to a painting in his living room. It is a self-portrait of the young Puvis de Chavannes. Next to it is a window that opens onto the Jewish cemetery that stretches behind his house. "Birth, Eros, religion," I say. "But above all, death." Yes, he says. Painting is the only path to immortality Man knows.

Victor Man's exhibition, *The Absence That We Are*, at David Zwirner in London closes October 31, 2025.

MELANCHOLIA OR THE PERIPATETIC GIRL, 2022–23, oil on canvas, 65 × 54 cm



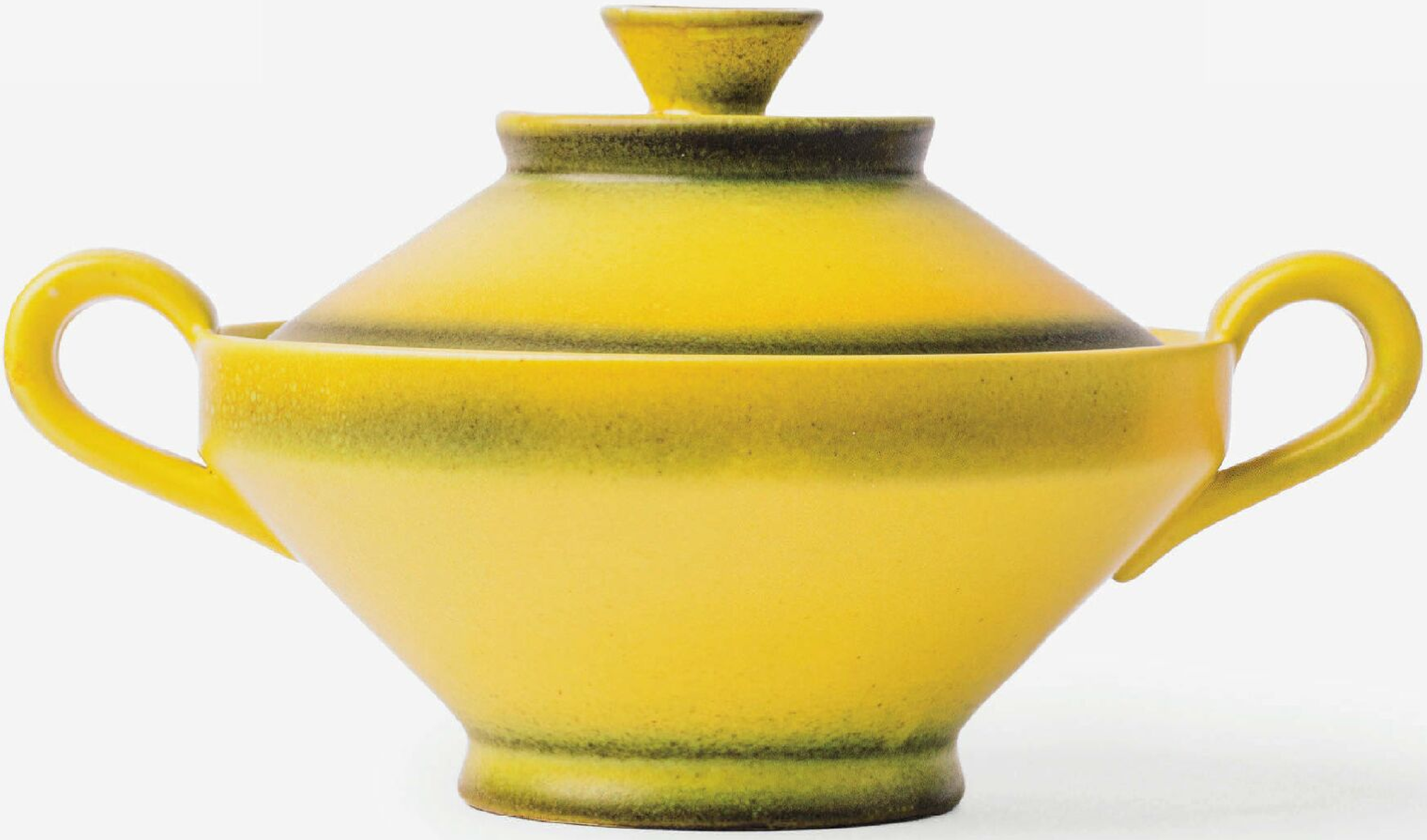


Fig. 1

Several

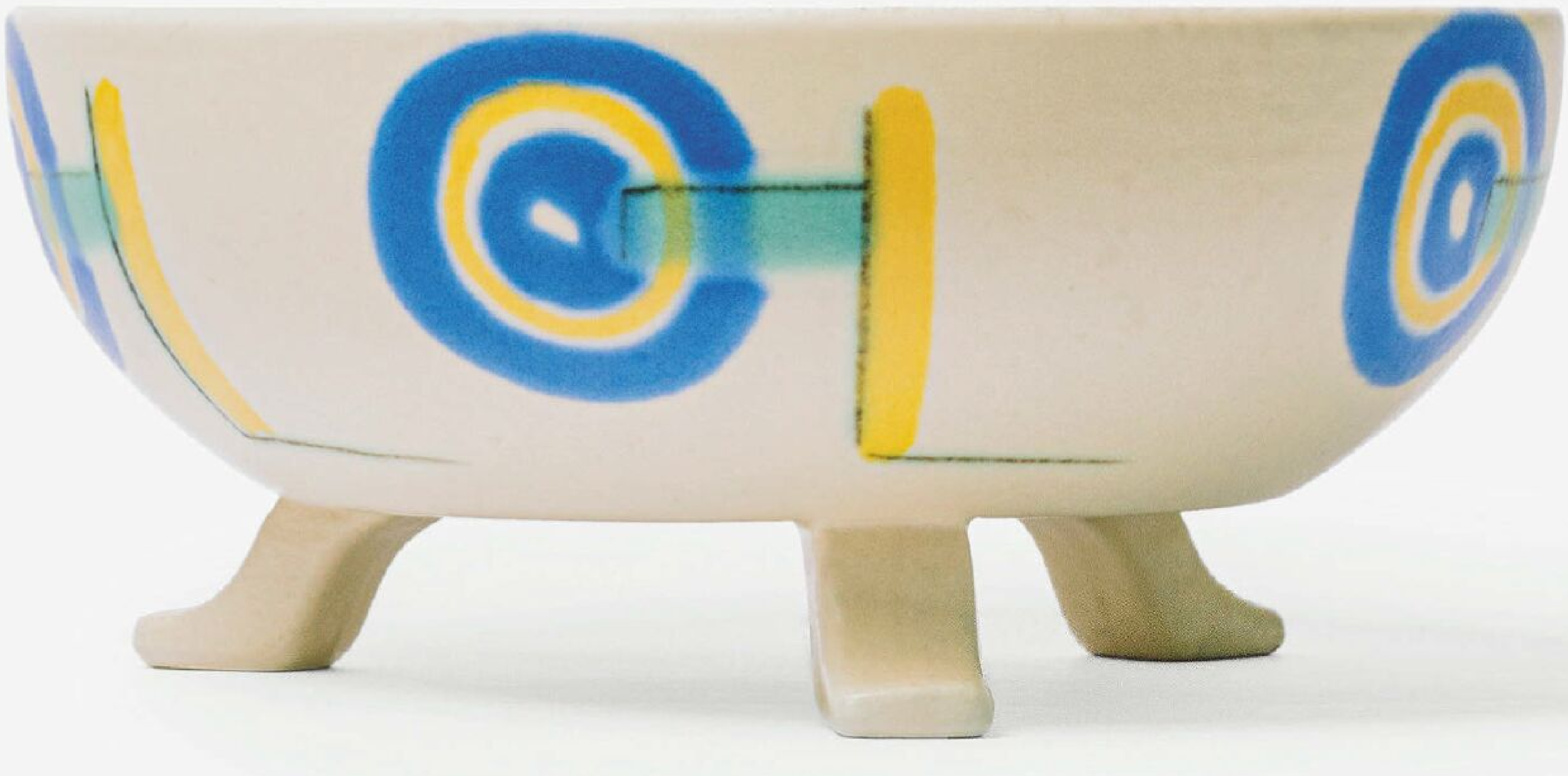


Fig. 2

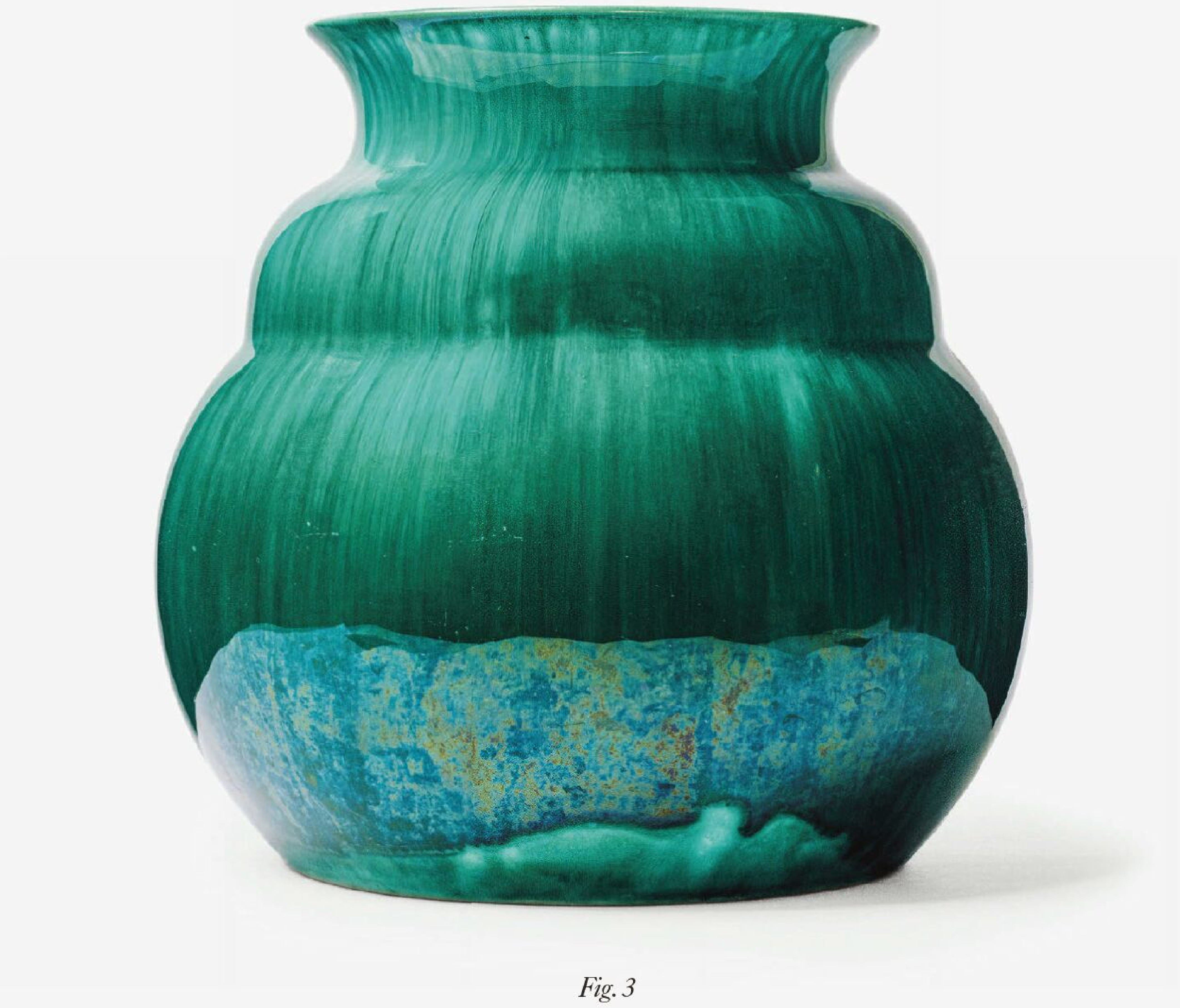


Fig. 3

Vessels

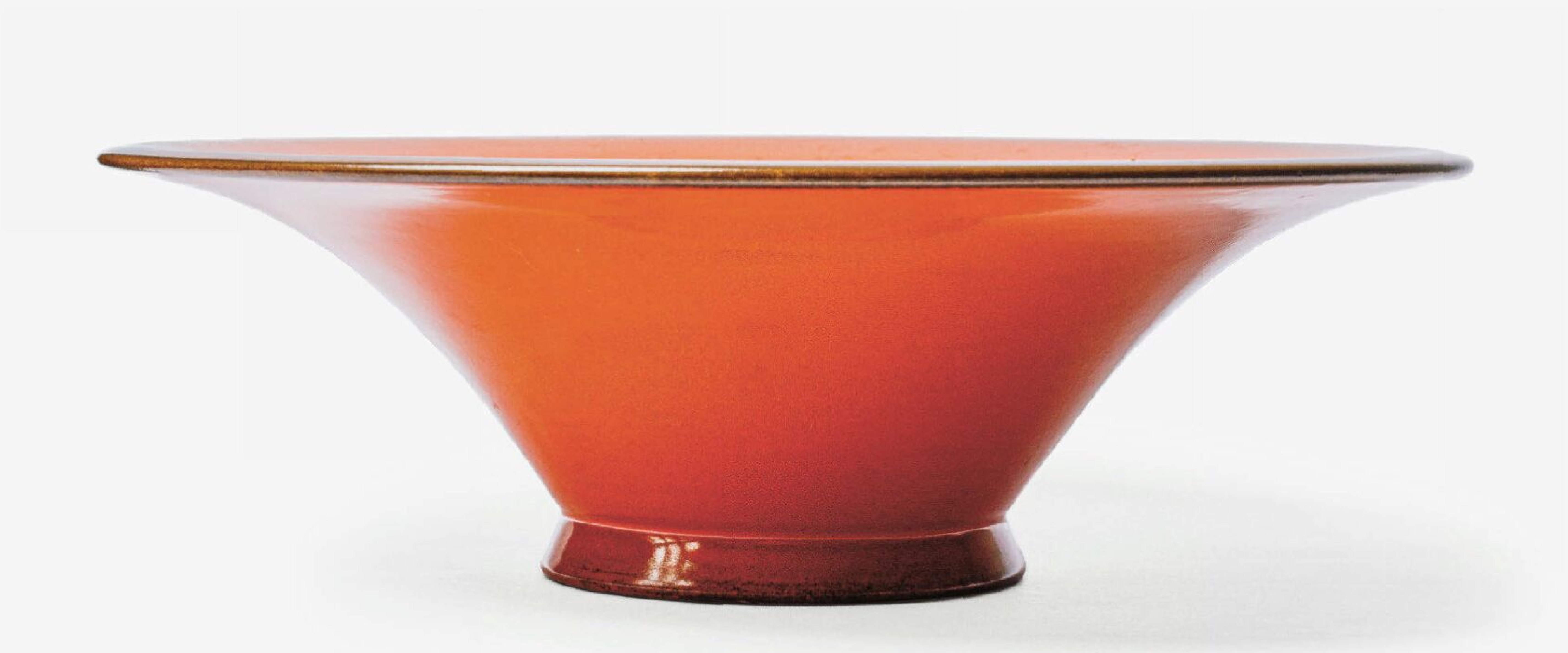


Fig. 4

Her playful modernism, inventive manner, and Bauhaus sensibilities made MARGARETE HEYMANN-LOEBENSTEIN the leading ceramic artist of the Weimar set. Here, superfan and collector *Udo Kittelmann* shares his wares—and remembers the tragic yet determinedly defiant life of the woman he's so fired up about

Around 2018, my family bought a small house deep in the forest of Brandenburg, effectively a ruin. As my wife and I spent a year and a half renovating it, I naturally grew interested in our new surroundings, the history of the place. Then, when we found some ceramic shards among the foundations during the process, I came to learn that the nearby town of Velten had always been an industrial hub for ceramics, particularly housewares, tiles, and sanitary ware.

I had been drawn to ceramics for quite some time, but this prompted me to look more closely. Soon I found myself captivated by the avant-garde designs of Margarete Heymann-Loebenstein, a Bauhaus-trained artist who rose to recognition in the 1920s and 1930s. She had worked in the area, co-founding in 1923 the Haël-Werkstätten für künstlerische Keramik (Haël Workshops for Artistic Ceramics). As a matter of fact, many Bauhaus graduates gravitated to Velten's factories, contributing as designers and extending the school's influence into applied arts.

What struck me about Heymann's work was its radical modernity. Some of her plates and bowls, if seen as paintings, recall Kenneth Noland in their bands of color and rhythmic glazing. At times they feel like works of László Moholy-Nagy or Wassily Kandinsky—an echo of Bauhaus experimentation transposed onto domestic objects. Let me also add that I have never truly understood the supposed hierarchy between high art and applied arts: ceramics are powerful precisely because they are meant to be *handled*.

In 2019, I found part of a Heymann tea set on eBay and discovered that the seller's family had received it as a gift from Heymann's own hands. This was the trigger. To me, there's nothing more beautiful than resting my hands on the palm prints of great artists. There is most certainly a good degree of mania behind it. I once got to touch Marcel Duchamp's perfume bottle, *Belle Haleine*, and a Franz Kafka postcard from Prague to Felice Bauer in Berlin. It had arrived within the day, a note about a missed meeting, trivial in content, yet charged by the trace of its maker.

Born to a well-to-do Jewish family in Cologne, Heymann studied painting at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf and later encountered Japanese art in Cologne. Accepted at Martin Gropius's Bauhaus in Weimar in 1920, she took classes with the likes of Johannes Itten, Gertrud Grunow, and Paul Klee. The men in charge of the ceramics class, however, preferred that women stick to weaving and, furthermore, believed that Heymann was "gifted but not suited to the workshop setting." In spite of that, she fought her way in. It was this kind of paternalism, to which she was allergic, that contributed to her founding her Haël workshop, the business side of which was run by her husband and his brother.

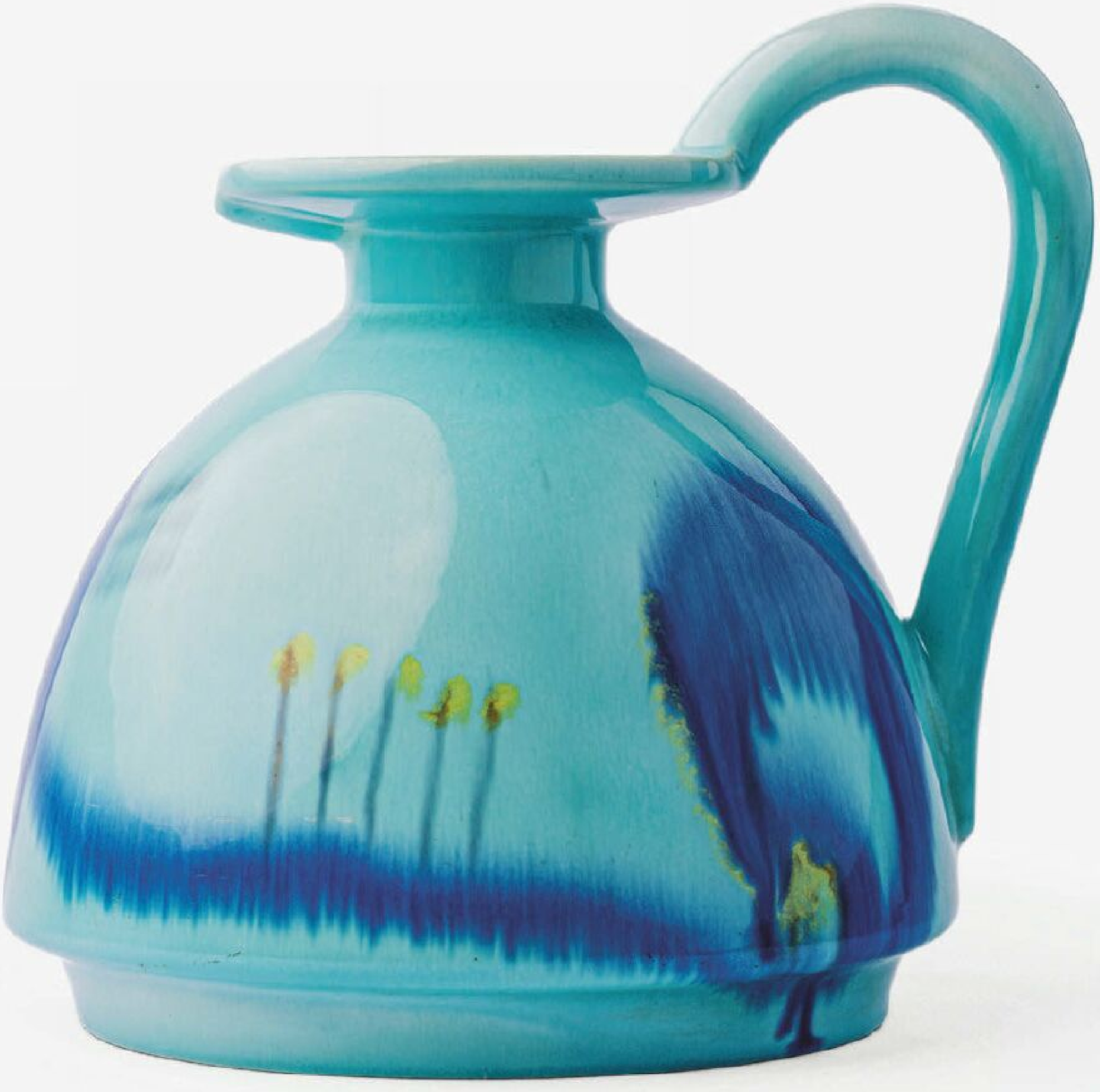
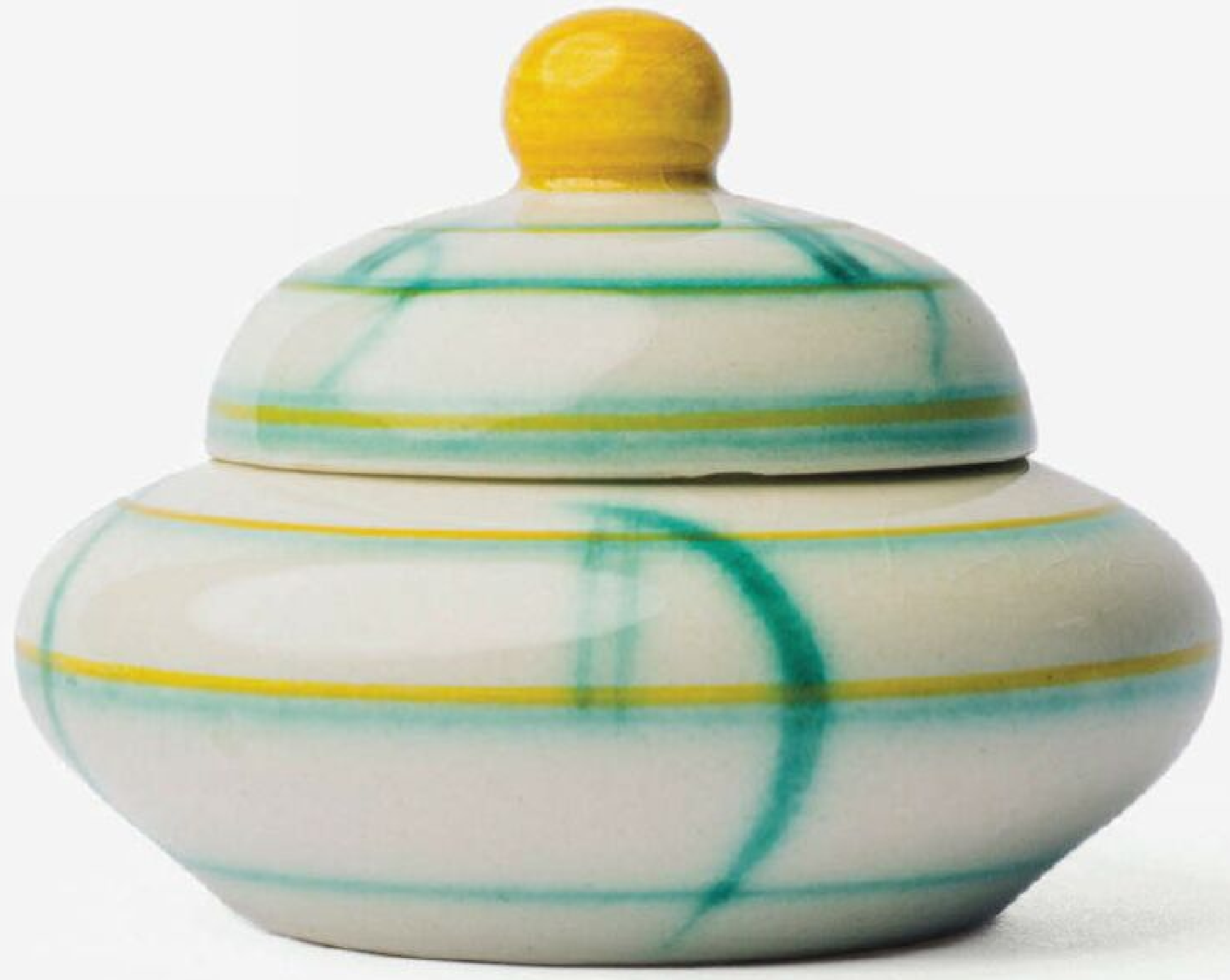


Fig. 5



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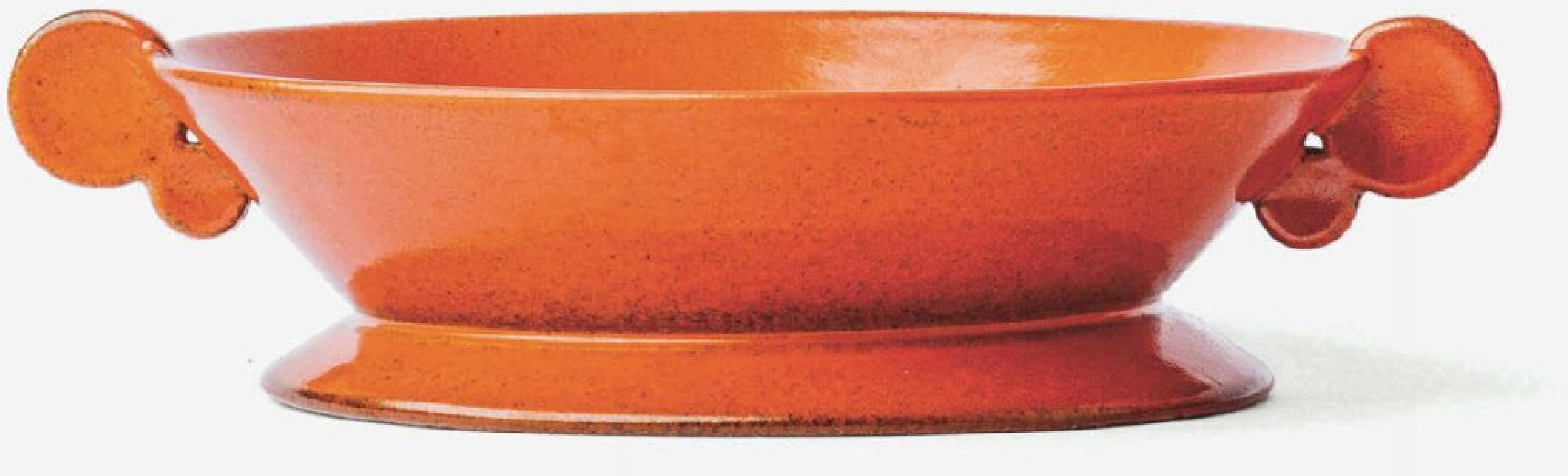

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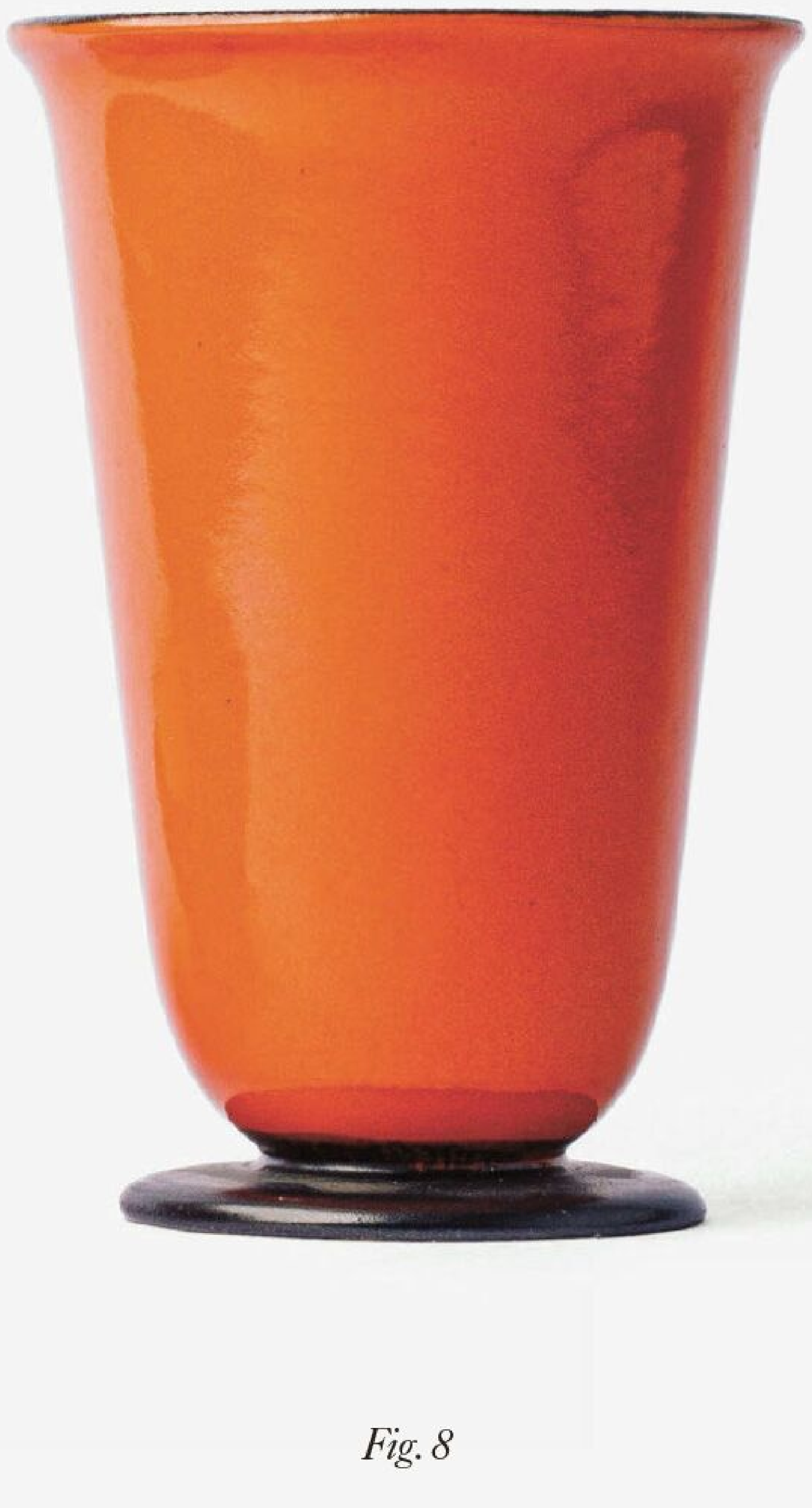

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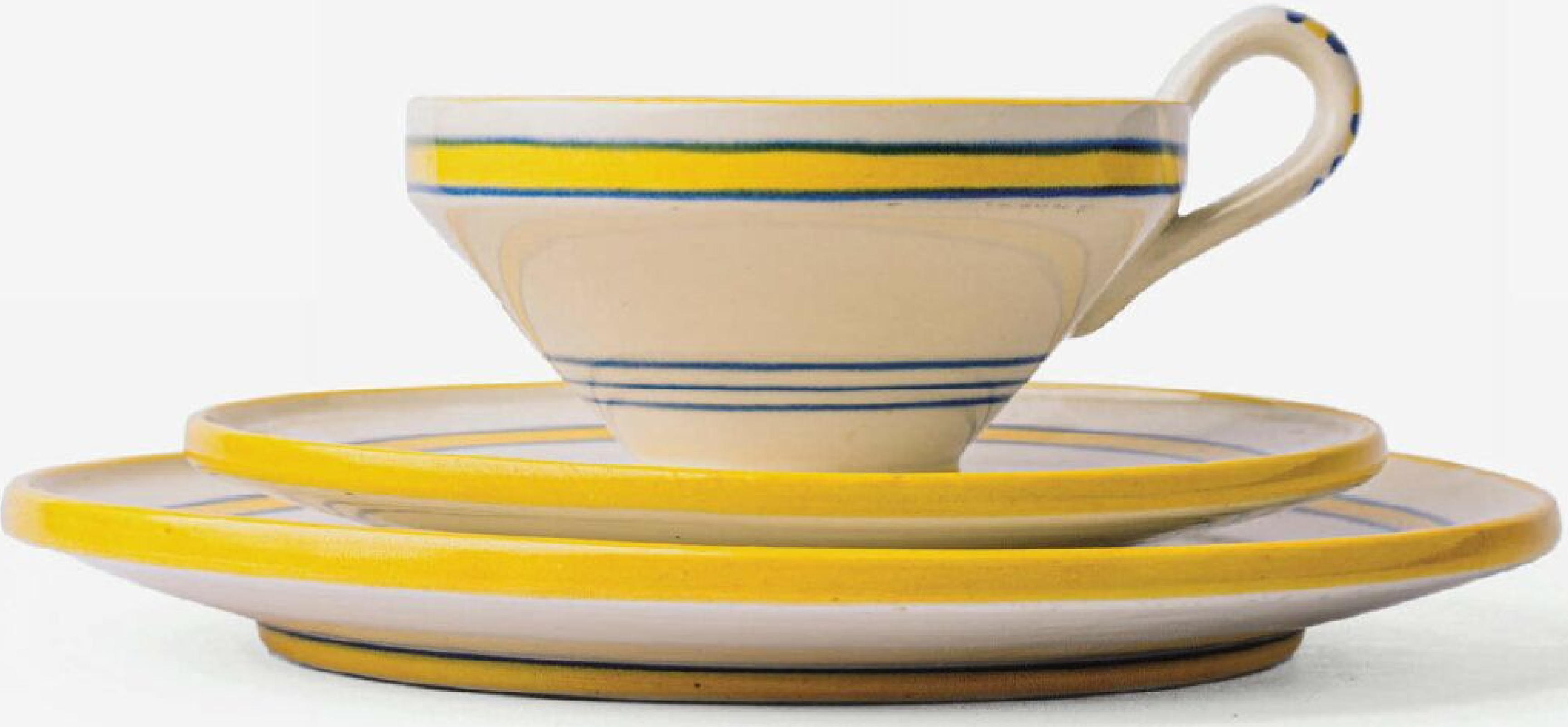

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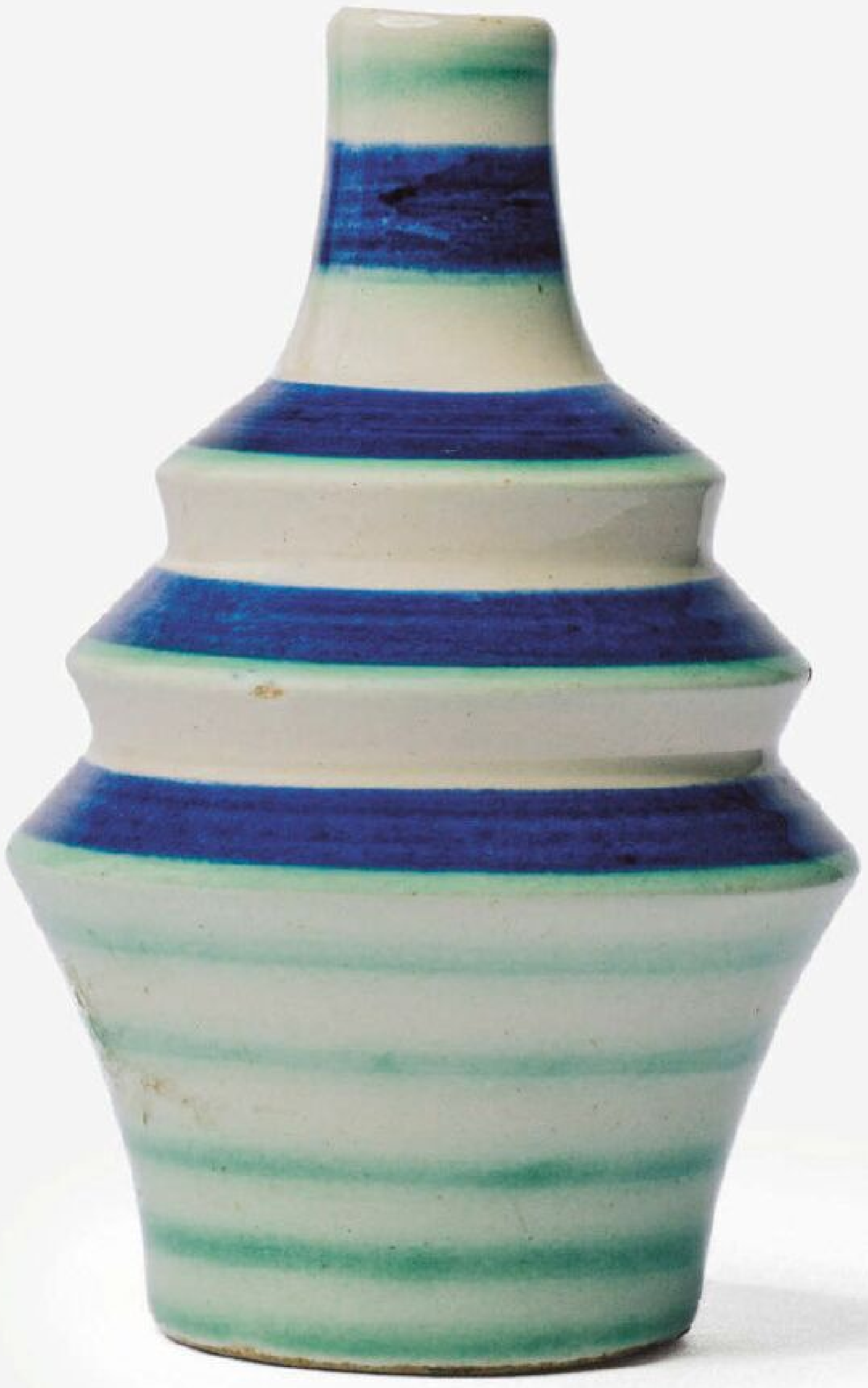

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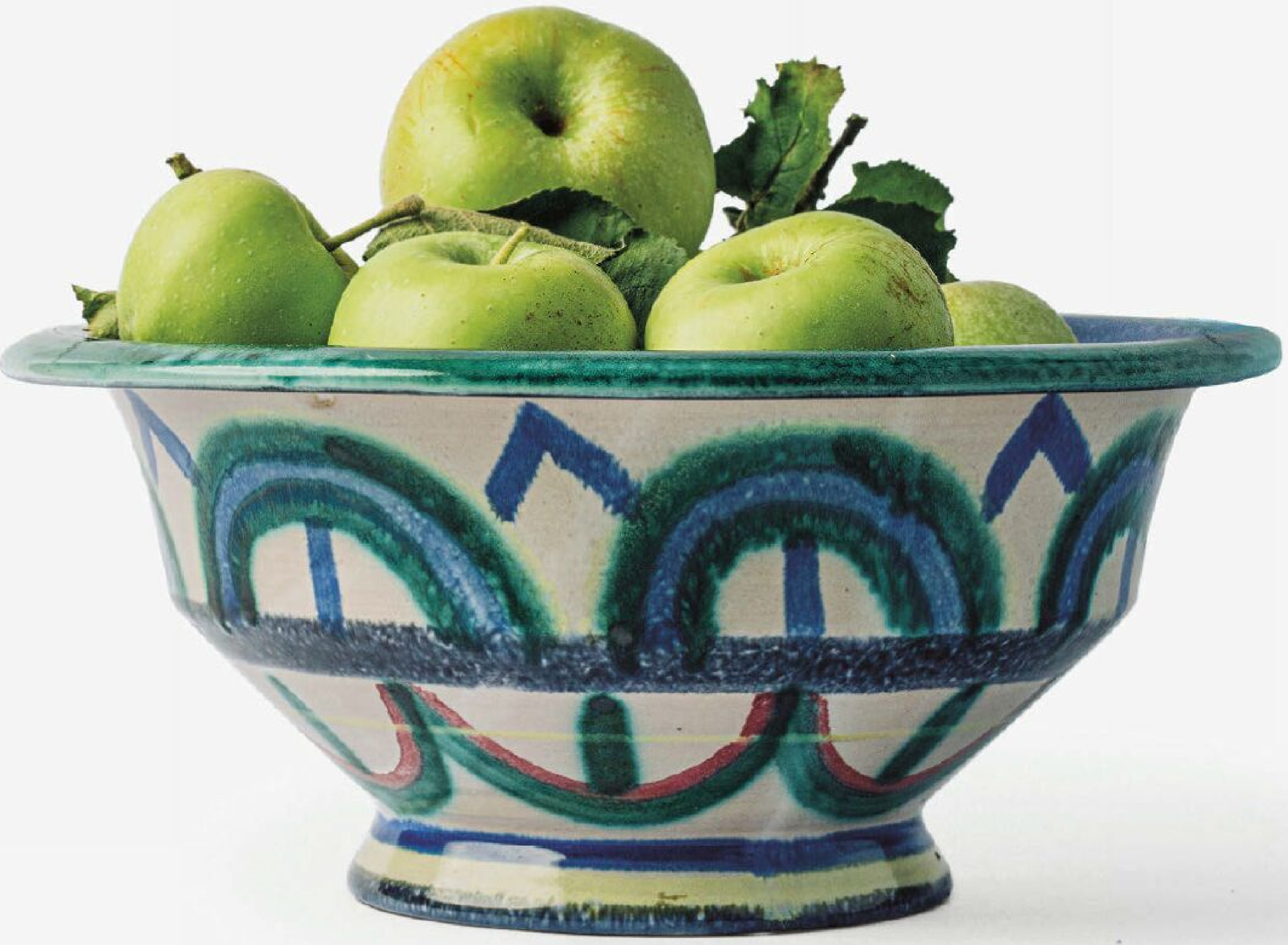

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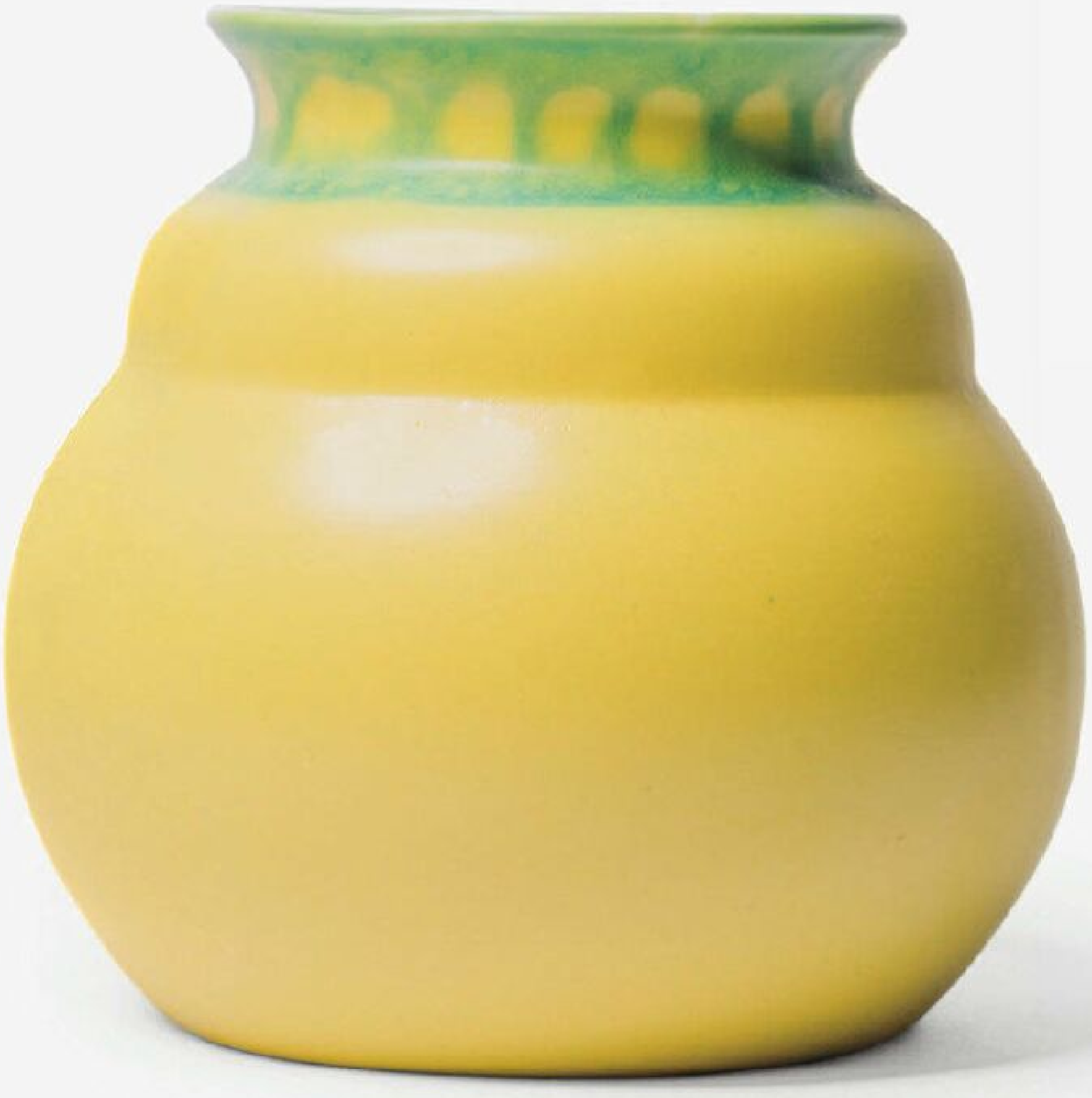

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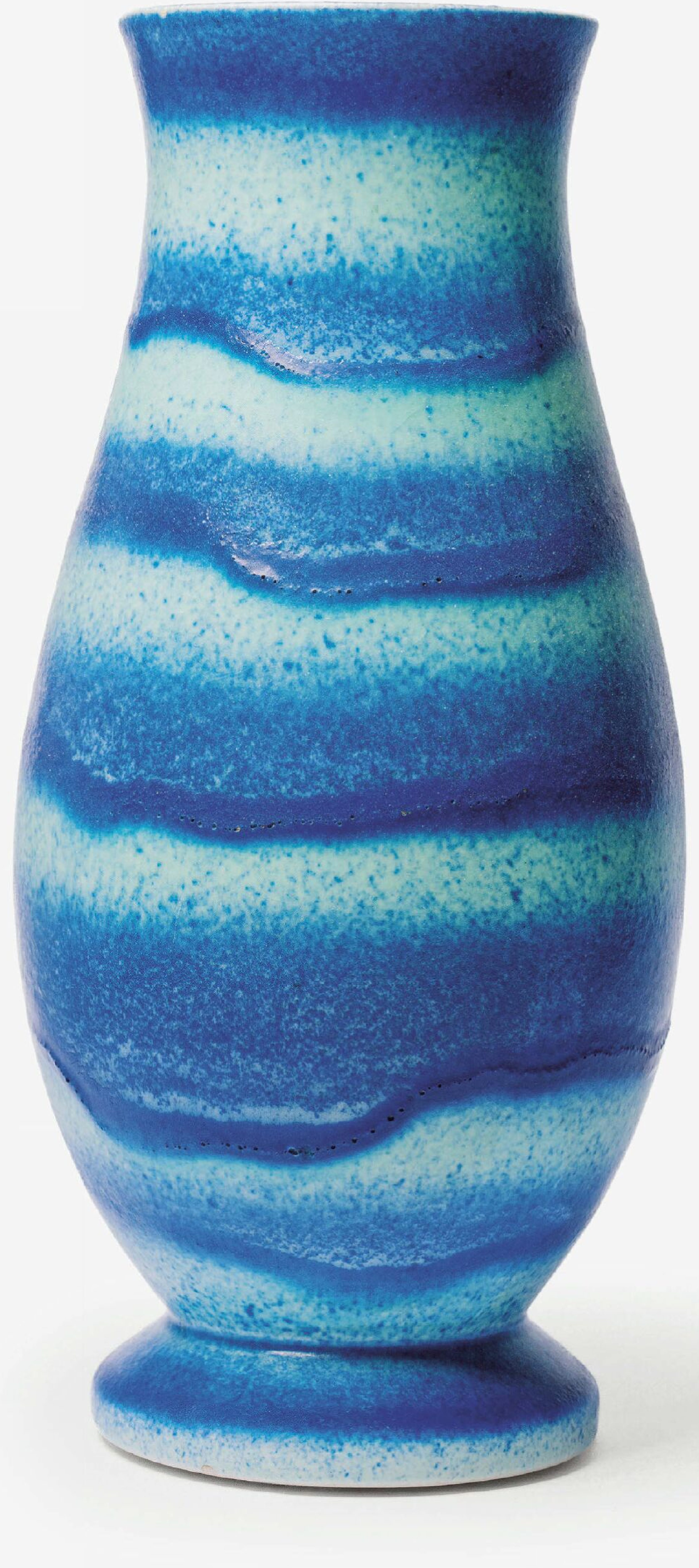

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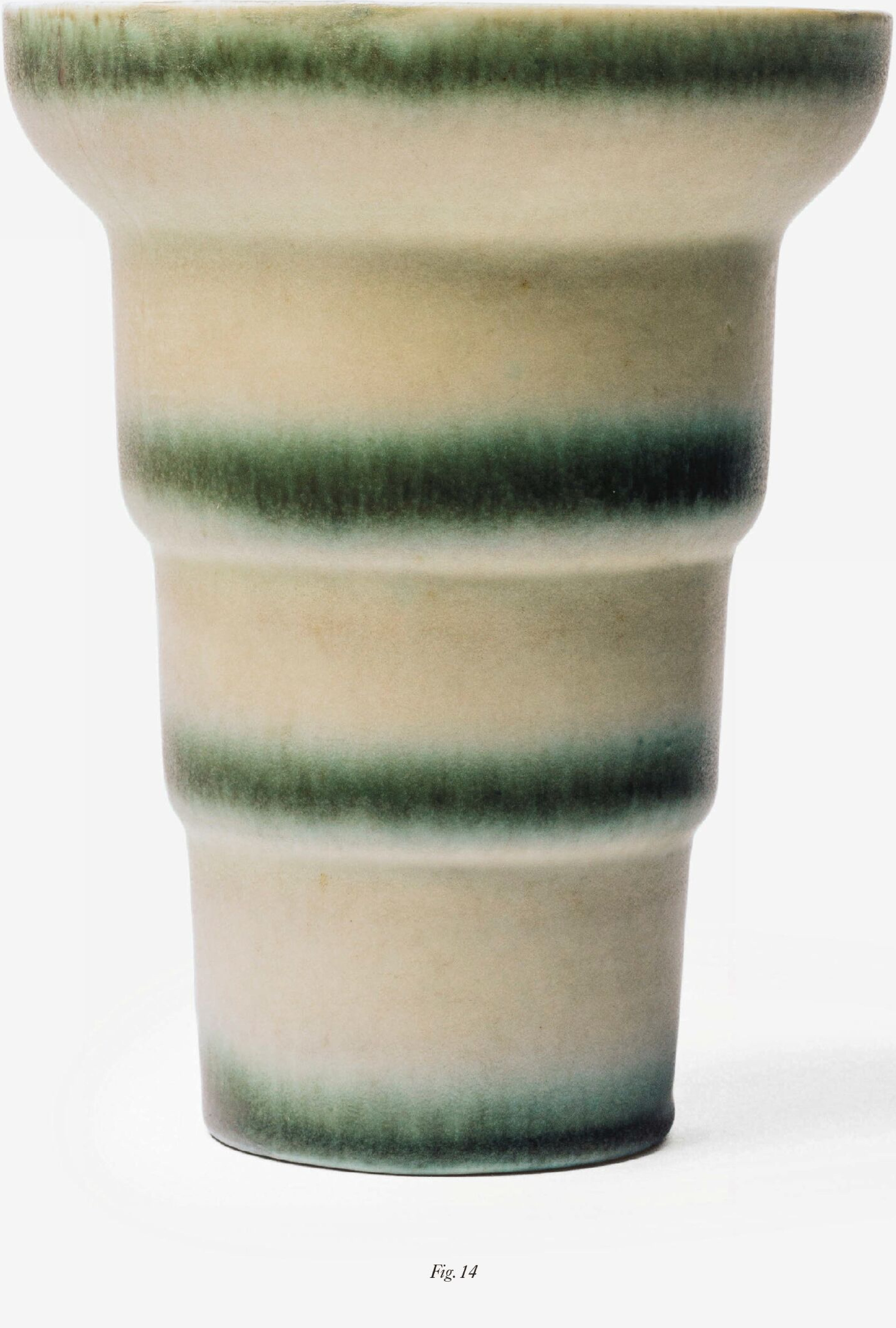


Fig. 14

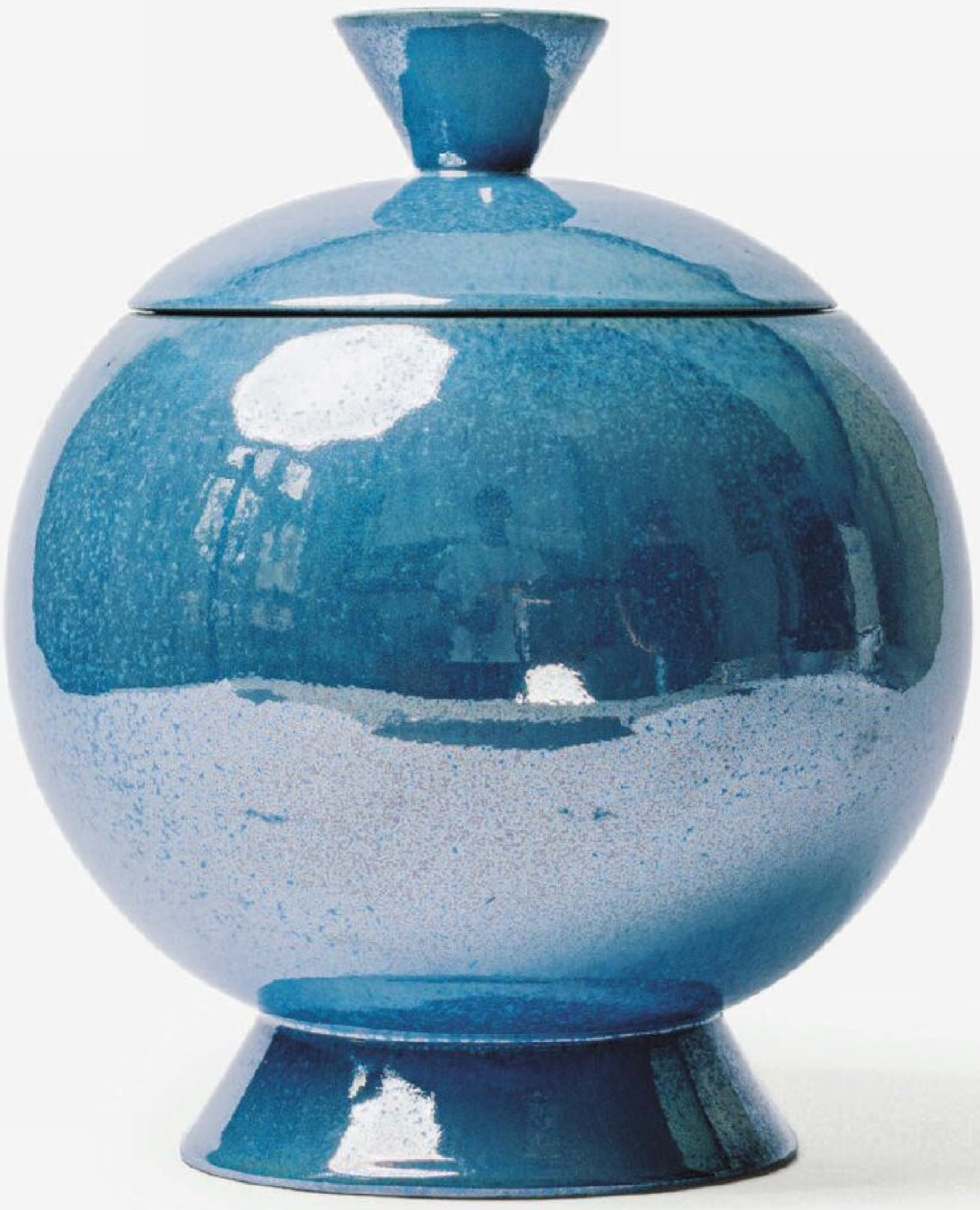


Fig. 15

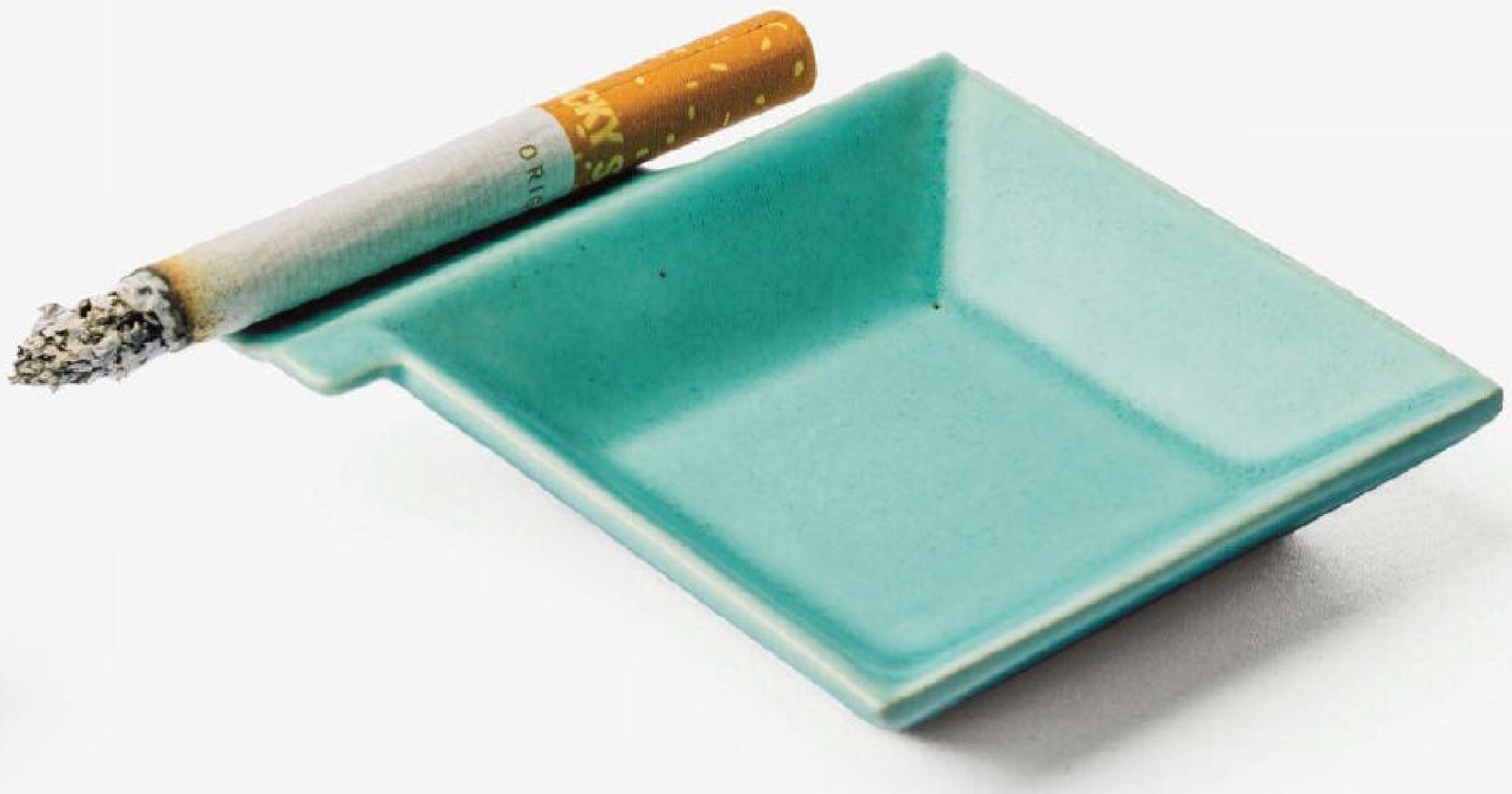


Fig. 16

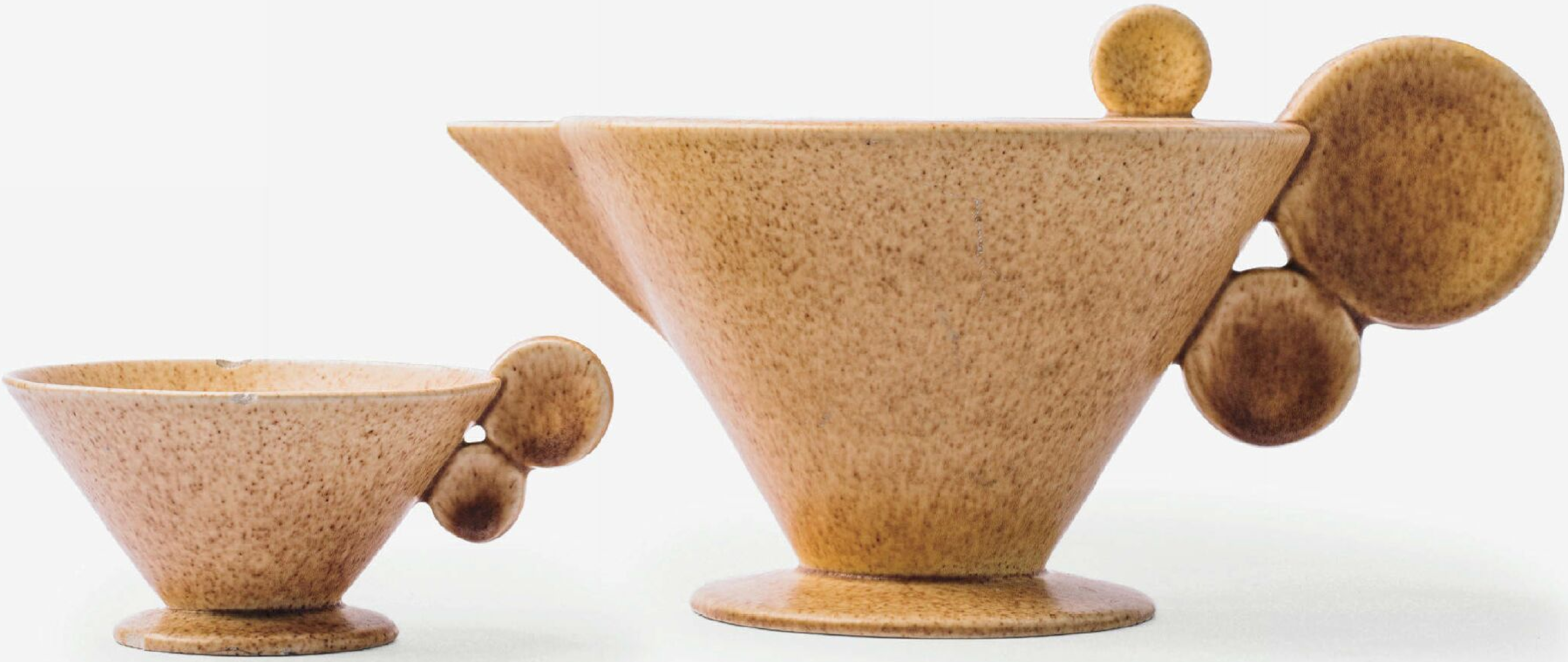


Fig. 17

Haël's aim was very Bauhaus: to produce practical crockery like vases, tea sets, ashtrays, and flowerpots. "The vernacular craftsmanship this strives for uses entirely modern forms, colors, and decorative ideas," an early review stated. Clearly inspired by Bauhaus teachers, the abstract, sometimes-asymmetrical decorations were very Weimar, but all Heymann's own—avant-garde vessels in entirely novel shapes. In that regard, it's interesting to note that her company also worked with Ewald Mataré, who would later become Joseph Beuys's teacher. Using simple shapes, her most famous designs adopted disks for handles and came in vibrant colors, made possible by new matte and glossy glazes that could be sprayed on before firing.

Soon, Heymann's workshop employed over 100 people. Having expanded into metal, plastic, and ivory, it exported its products worldwide. Then came the first disaster: in 1928, her husband and brother-in-law were killed in a car accident, leaving her alone with two young sons. Despite this, she continued to run the company and even steered it through Germany's desperate economic crisis, during which she launched her *Norma* series.

A few years later, when the Nazis came to power, Heymann's designs were inevitably added to the growing list of what would later be labeled "degenerate" art. She was forced to sell the company far below its value and in 1936 fled to the United Kingdom, where she produced her own handmade ceramics under the name Greta Pottery for about 15 years. Yet she never regained her earlier success. The British ceramics industry was in turmoil during and after the war, and the male-dominated pottery world found the independent artist difficult to work with; her designs were judged hair-raisingly outrageous in austerity Britain.

She died in 1990. Only 15 years ago was her work properly rediscovered and appreciated. Now, rightfully, it has been collected by MoMA and Cooper Hewitt in New York, the V&A in London, and the Jewish Museum in Berlin.

The home and office Heymann built in Marwitz is still standing, much as it was in her heyday, and a ceramics workshop continues to operate out of the old factory. Named after Hedwig Bollhagen, another Bauhaus-trained ceramicist who ran the business from 1934 until her death in 2001, it reproduced some of Heymann's designs during the Nazi era, only under Bollhagen's name.

At first, I only had two or three of Heymann's pieces, and now I'm up to 25, 30—you really have to watch yourself with ceramics. But it is simply too beautiful to live amidst this history, to use them, to surround my family with these objects that were made right here, from this very soil, over a century ago.

Fig. 1
SUGAR BOWL, c. 1925
Stoneware, paint, matte glaze, airbrushed decoration, 9 cm high

Fig. 2
BOWL, c. 1925–30
Stoneware, paint, glaze, 7 cm high

Fig. 3
VASE, c. 1925–30
Stoneware, glossy glaze, 23 cm high

Fig. 4
BOWL, c. 1925–30
Stoneware, glossy glaze, 8 cm high

Fig. 5
JUG, c. 1925–30
Stoneware, paint, glaze, 17 cm high

Fig. 6
CONTAINER, c. 1925–30
Stoneware, paint, glaze, 10 cm high

Fig. 7
BOWL FROM TOY TEA SET, c. 1930
Stoneware, glaze, 3 cm high

Fig. 8
VASE, c. 1930
Stoneware, glossy glaze, 17 cm high

Fig. 9
PART OF TEA SET, c. 1925–30
Light-fired body, white slip-coat, paint, 9 cm high

Fig. 10
VASE, 1924, stoneware, paint, glaze

Fig. 11
BOWL, c. 1925–30
Stoneware, paint, glaze, 9 cm high

Fig. 12
VASE, c. 1925–30
Stoneware, matte glaze, 21 cm high

Fig. 13
VASE, c. 1925–30
Stoneware, airbrushed decoration, 28 cm high

Fig. 14
VASE, c. 1925–30
Stoneware, glaze, 18 cm high

Fig. 15
CONTAINER, c. 1925–30
Stoneware, paint, glossy glaze, 17 cm high

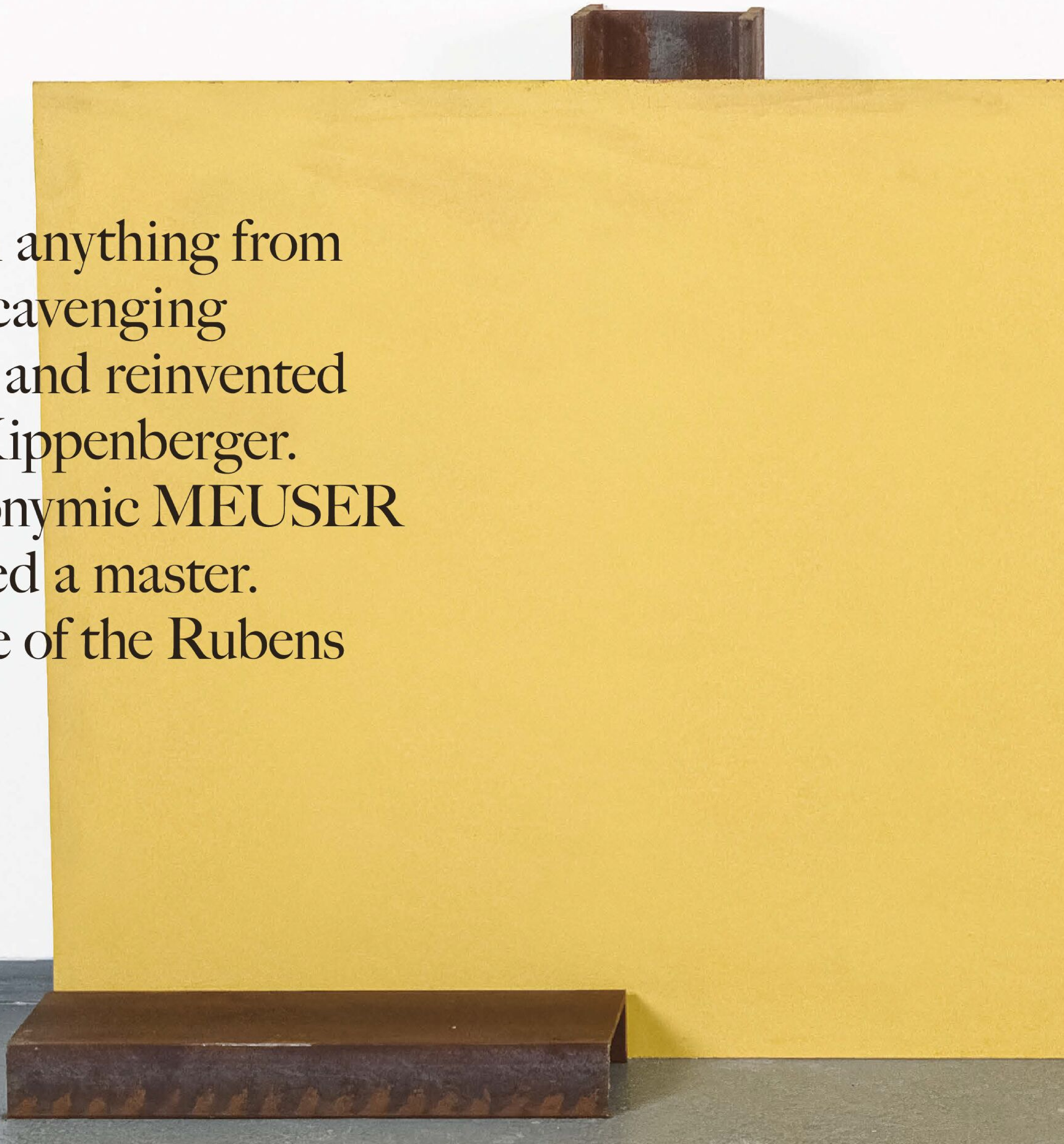
Fig. 16
ASHTRAY, c. 1930
Stoneware, matte glaze, 8 cm wide

Fig. 17
PART OF TEA SET, c. 1930
Stoneware, matte glaze, various dimensions

MAN OF STEEL

by
CORNELIUS TITTEL

He didn't learn anything from Beuys, went scavenging with Knoebel, and reinvented sculpture for Kippenberger. Now the mononymic MEUSER is finally deemed a master. A day in the life of the Rubens of heavy metal



For 50 years, Meuser has been going to the scrapyard. Wearing a white shirt and a dark jacket, on good days and bad—like a painter dragging themselves into the studio even when they suspect nothing great will get onto the canvas. But right now, Meuser cannot remember ever having been this annoyed.

He had picked out five pieces of metal with a Russian-German excavator operator, with whom he works almost as well as he did back in the day with the guy from Düsseldorf who bred chickens and, despite their good chemistry, always refused invitations to the artist's exhibition openings. "We moved in different worlds, so that made sense," Meuser says before returning to the matter at hand. So those five pieces were set aside to be transported to his studio. And now this: "Cleared off! By the other excavator operator, who's fuzzy in the head because of his diabetes."

"What a shitshow," Meuser continues, drawing on his cigarette like he's angry with it. Every time he exhales, he rubs his thumb across his right cheek, the sound of skin snapping back dramatically, accentuating the silence.

"Five pieces," he says again, shaking his head. "That's almost enough for a show. And gallerists want more and more these days, for the art fairs, London, Paris, Miami—you name it." He wants me to understand one thing: "Scrap metal, there's so much of it. And a lot of it is garbage too." All the more painful when someone with diabetes destroys weeks of work.

Now, the artist sits in the dining room of his sun-drenched home in Karlsruhe. On the wall behind him is an early work that he hasn't sold because he considers it too reminiscent of the Russian constructivists—"It doesn't really work, but whatever"—as well as a photograph by his friend Axel Hütte hanging over a bronze head by Günther Förg. Meuser has rolled up his sleeves, as though he needs more elbow room to handle the lighter in front of him, the ashtray, the two packs of cigarettes. Over the next two hours, he will keep moving them around like someone running a shell game, while we reconstruct the biography of one of Germany's great unsung artists—even as said artist, having overcome his gloomy mood, consistently thwarts all efforts to stay on topic. One second, he'll be discussing Ellsworth Kelly, the next, he'll bring up an argument he had with Van Dyck the previous week.

"An argument with Van Dyck?"

"That's what I call my assistant. Just a joke, because I'm Rubens."

"Why Rubens?"

"Because I like fat people."

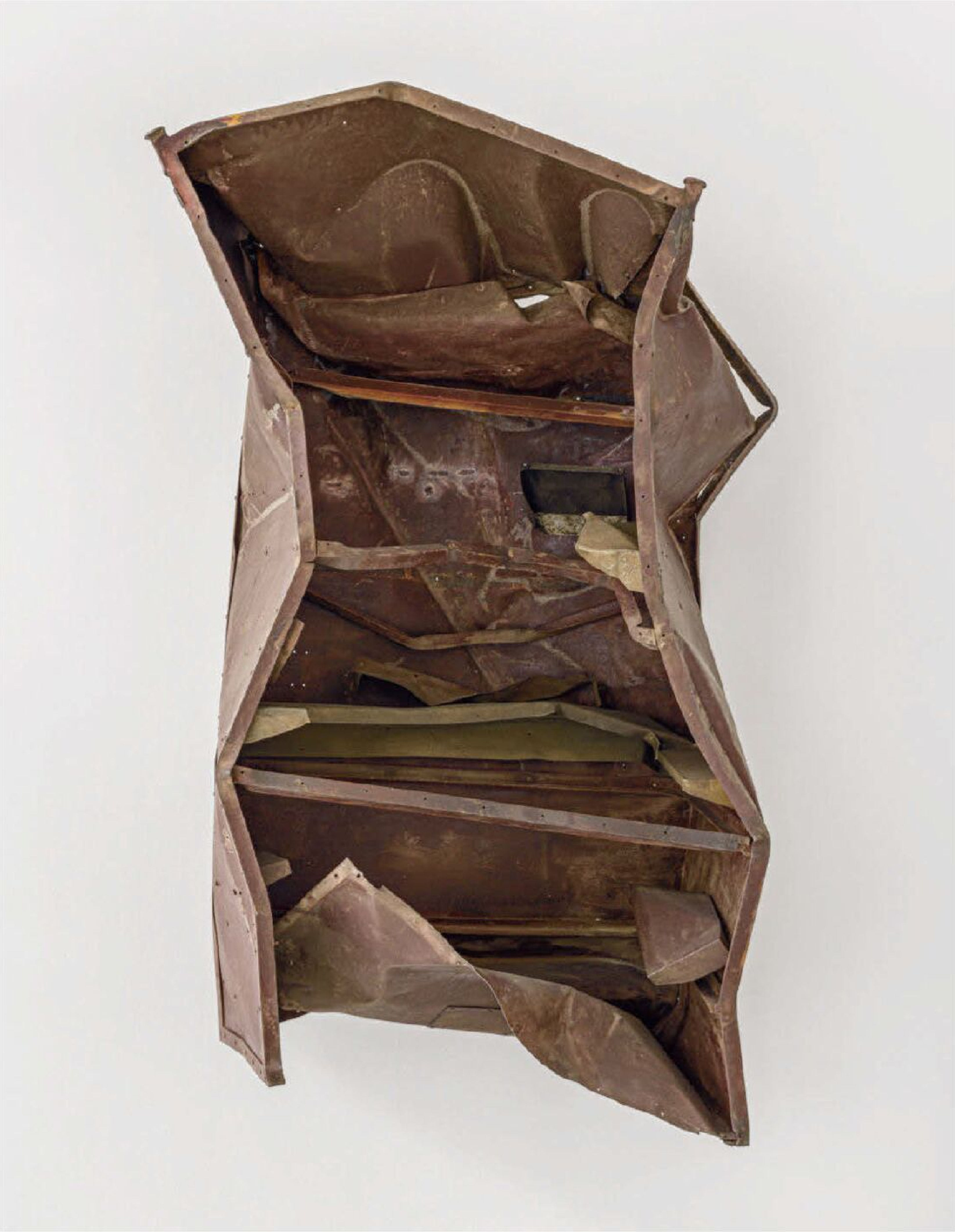
"Seriously?"

"Haven't you noticed there are more and more of them?"

"Not really."

"Maybe not in Berlin, but here there are. It's crazy what people stuff themselves with."

"Really?"



RAPPELKISTE, 2017, steel, oil paint, 207 × 108 × 72 cm

"Believe me, it's extreme. I'm planning a book on it."

"A whole book?"

"Yes, I'm gonna photograph them all. They can even wear the clothes they feel most comfortable in. I already have a title."

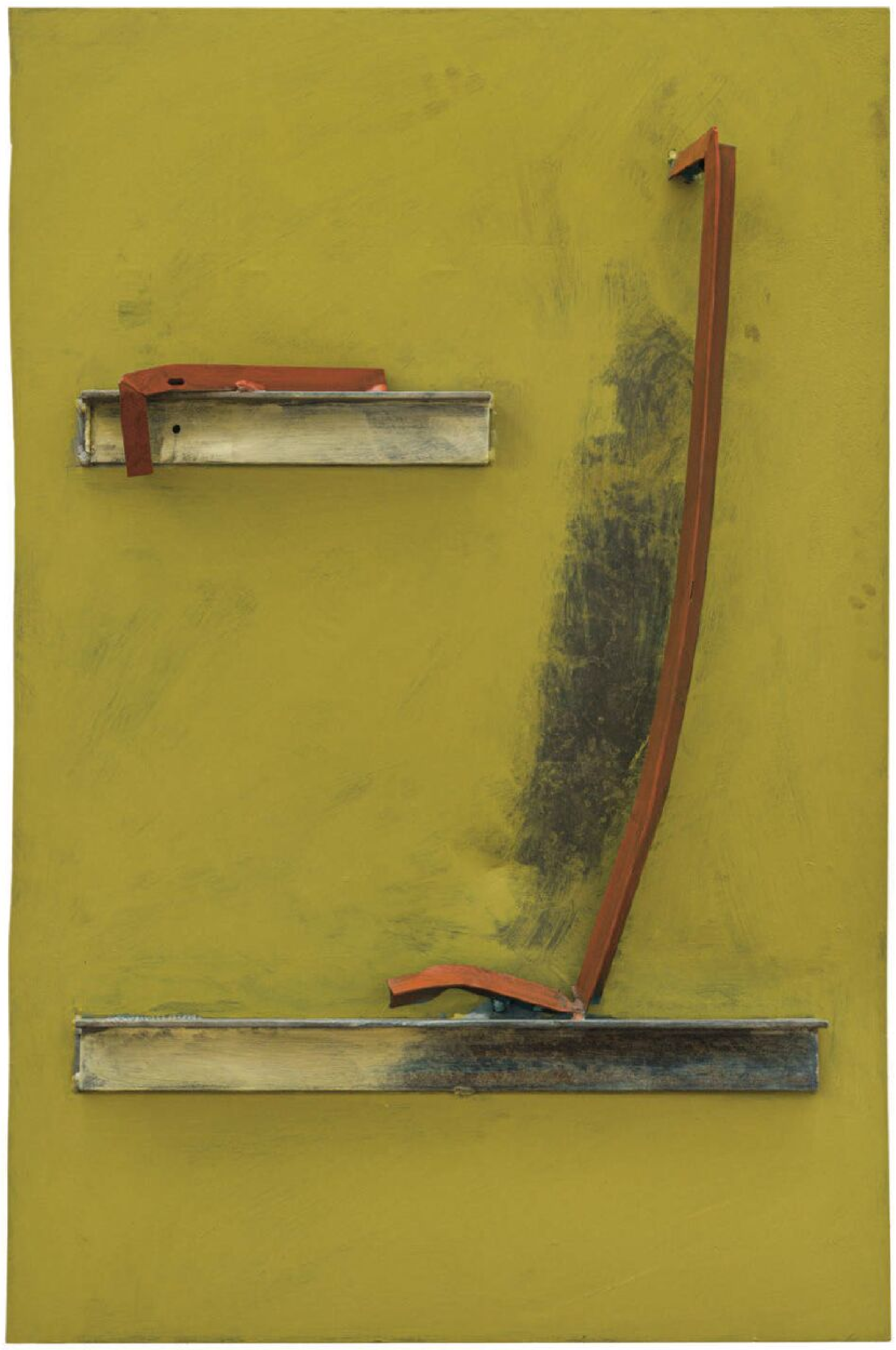
"Which would be?"

"Unsystematic Mass Screening of Fatties."

But how did the boy known as "Meuser" for so long he hardly remembers his full name become the artist whose doorbell now reads, "Professor Meuser"? And how did he reconcile Blinky Palermo's asceticism with Martin Kippenberger's anarchy and cast out the pathos of minimal art in the process?

As little as he may think of linear narratives, his beginnings seem undisputed: Meuser was born in Essen in 1947. As a child, he tells me, he was serious, sweet, and largely inconspicuous. He only grew cross-eyed when he popped a champagne cork into his eye much later. Meuser's father—"He built locomotives for that shit Adolf. Serious business, they needed them to work"—was an engineer who became a technical inspector after the war, taking his son with him on his travels

MEUSER in Karlsruhe, photographed by MARC KRAUSE for BLAU International
Opening spread: WANDUNG, 1986, steel, yellow steel grounding, 163 × 220 × 44 cm



UNTITLED, *2022*, steel, oil paint, 150 × 99 × 14 cm

to the many industrial companies across the West-German Ruhr area. At school, Meuser liked math as much as drawing. He studied the old masters at the Folkwang Museum, hitchhiked to the Munch Museum in Oslo, saw a Malevich exhibition on his high school-graduation trip to Berlin—and still only barely let himself be talked out of studying mathematics. "My teacher told me that it's not enough to be good at math. The university lectures are basically incomprehensible, so you're always playing catch-up. I also thought about architecture, but I couldn't imagine having to talk to clients all the time. So I thought, 'I'll make art, then I can stay myself.'"

While attending a course in Münster to prepare his portfolio for art-school applications, he heard about a professor in Düsseldorf who always wore a hat and recently put a large wedge of fat on a chair. "'Aha,' I thought, 'That's interesting, let's go *there*.'" In a hallway at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, he met Johannes Stüttgen, the tutor of Joseph Beuys's class, standing on a ladder. "I told him I'd like to study there. And he answered, 'You're in.' I said: 'Oh, that's amazing. Are you being serious or are you just telling me what I want to hear?'" He wasn't. It was 1968—and Meuser was starting art school.

When I ask him what exactly he learned there, those years in which his professor rose from local phenom to star fixture of the art world, Meuser looks authentically perplexed, as if pantomiming the utter confusion of that era. It is difficult to put into words—even he is at a loss as to what he did, practically, during that time. "The whole superstructure paralyzed me. Both Beuys's own and that of the student movement. If I'd immersed myself too much in the Beuys universe, I'd have made sculptures out of sand and salt like the other students. But this much was already clear to me: that wouldn't get me anywhere." For him, the 1960s student revolt was, above all, a permanent distraction—"'Equal pay for everyone, even in Tierra del Fuego.' That's how it went, all day every day." With Jörg Immendorff, he founded Rote Zelle Kunst (Red Cell Art), "which was no fun either, because Jörg was such an autocratic sock."

Meuser's own work at the time? "I didn't do any. I swallowed that bullshit for seven years, until 1975, when I was finally fed up. Then I said, 'That's enough, now I'll do something.'" Only what? "I went to a scrapyard."

Art as an extended workbench, the heavy industry, steel, and coal along the Ruhr: it was the world of his childhood and his father that Meuser immersed himself in—and a former student of Beuys would become his first real teacher. "Seriously," Meuser tells me, "it was Imi Knoebel who gave me the confirmation I needed, who said, 'It's OK, just do it.' And when I did, it worked."

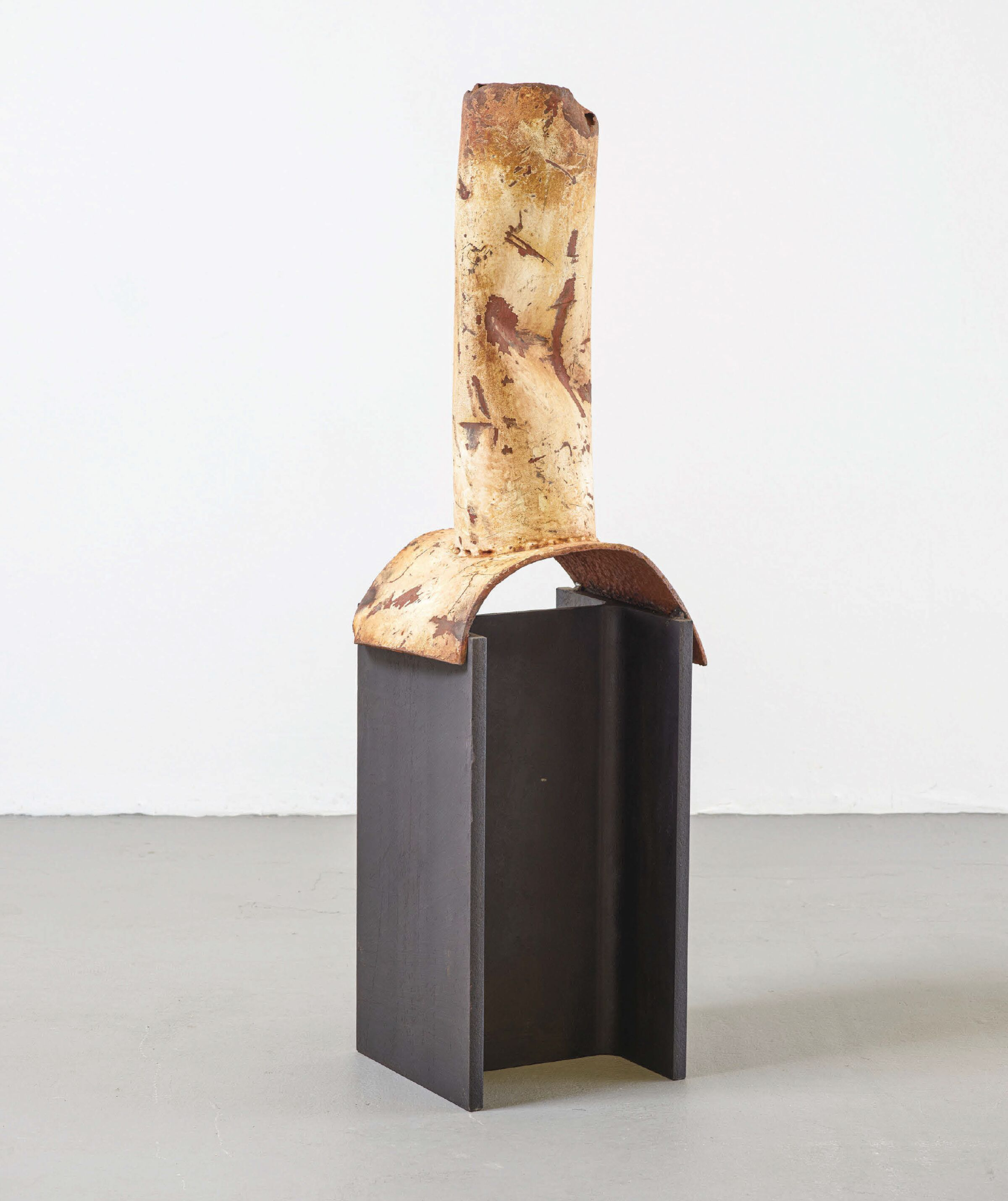
"At the scrapyard,
I could see something and
think, 'Yes, no, maybe.'
Sometimes Imi came along.
And I really dove in"

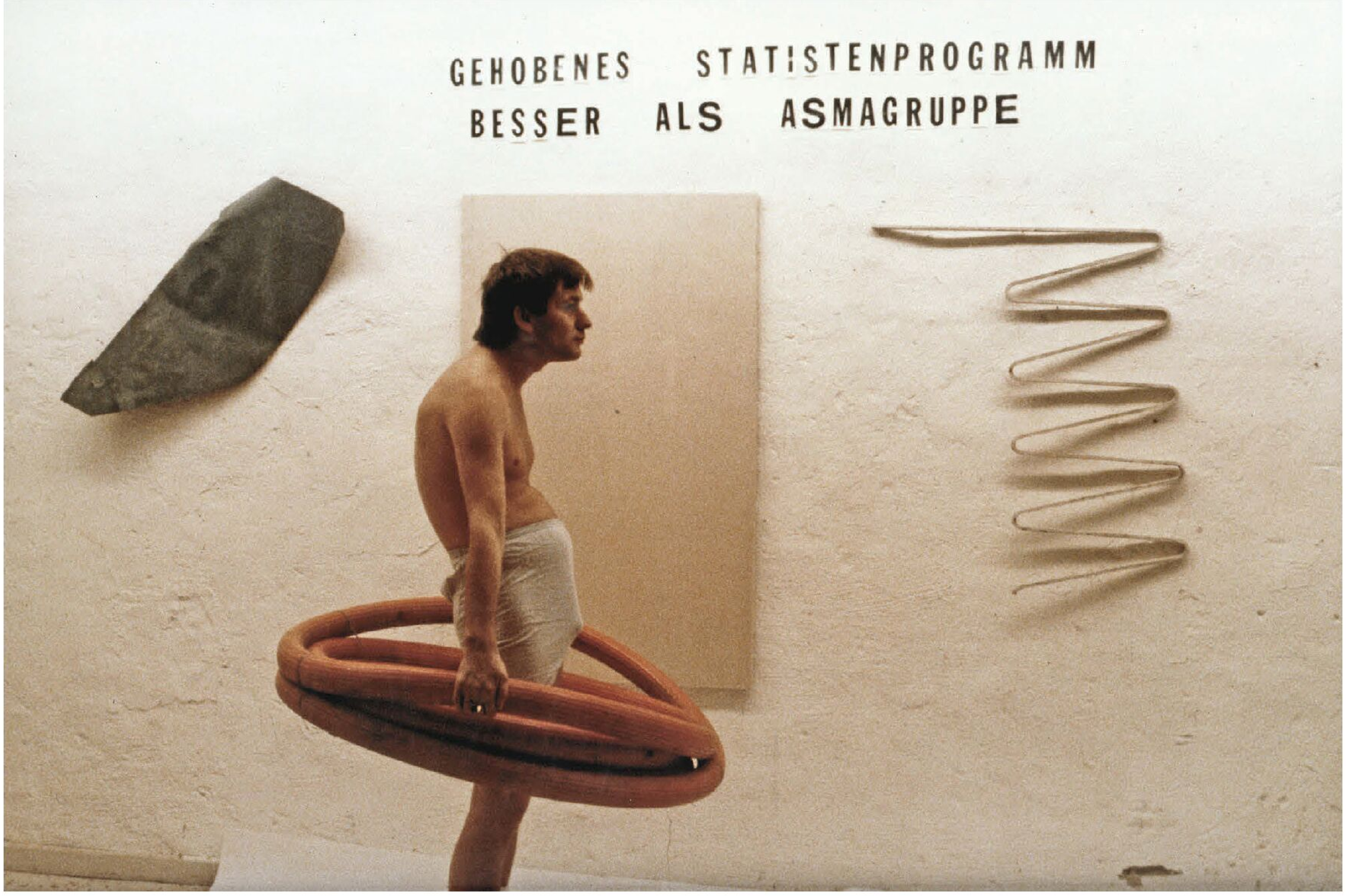
After all, he had gained knowledge without end at the academy. He looked at everything and tried to understand it, got to know Dieter Roth, and even shook hands with Donald Judd. "And then there was Imi. He had also studied with Beuys, but unlike me, he already had a real style of his own. Imi was only seven years older, but for me it was like a different generation. Imi, Blinky Palermo, Ulrich Rückriem—these were the people I admired."

The scrapyard became a shortcut: "Out of necessity. I went to a steel trader first. But I knew that it'd be Christmas before I could cobble together something from *that* stuff. Coincidentally, what I was looking for was already happening in the pieces at the scrapyard." There, he found "enough animation." "At the scrapyard, I could see something and think, 'Yes, no,

UNTITLED, 2021, steel, oil paint, 112 × 35 × 28 cm

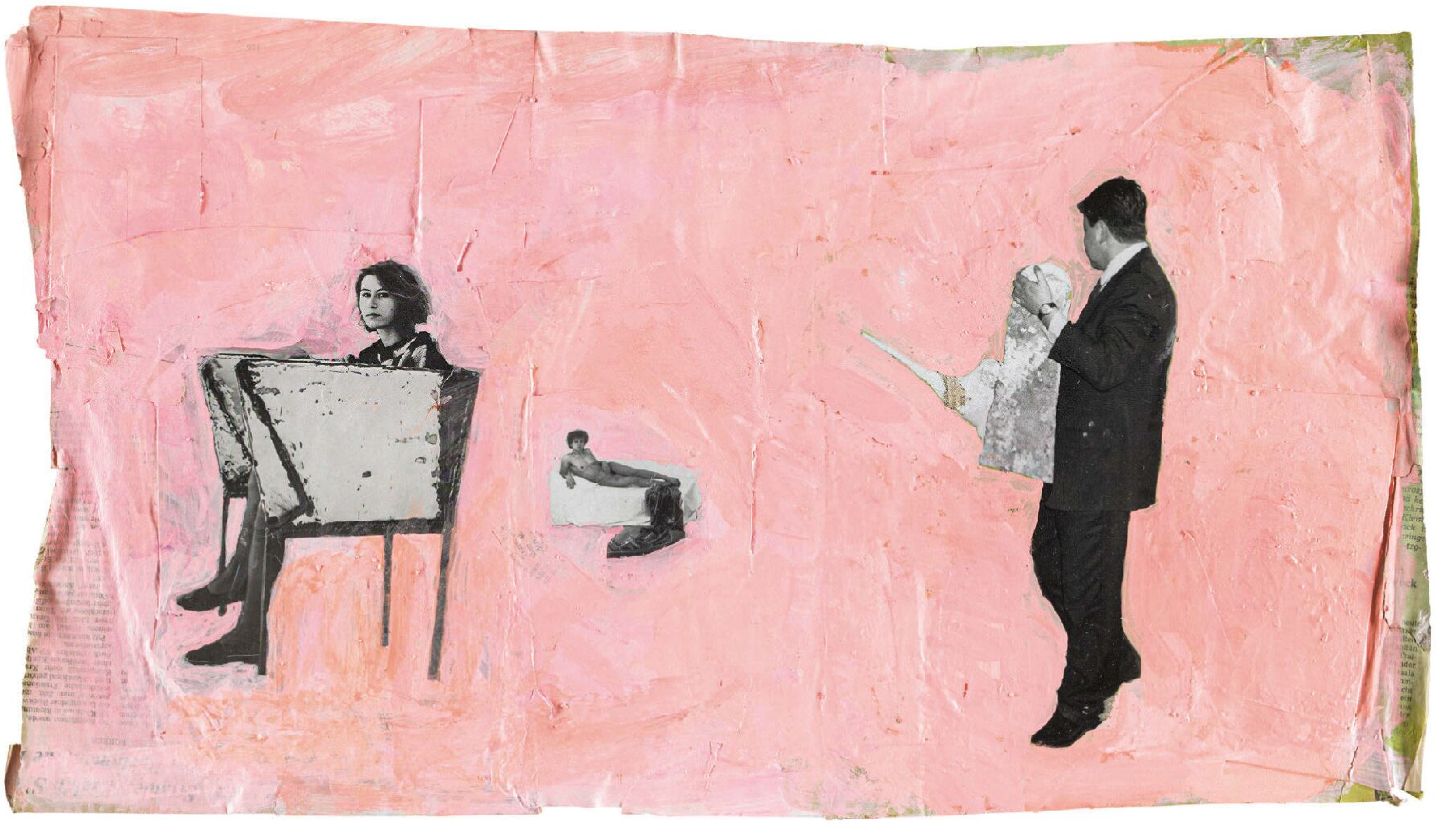
Following spread: Installation view, MEUSER: CLOSE TO THE MATERIAL, at Galerie Nordenhake, Mexico City, 2021




GEHOBENES STATISTENPROGRAMM
BESSER ALS ASMAGRUPPE

MARTIN KIPPENBERGER, *Gehobenes Statistenprogramm*,
showing Kippenberger in Meuser's Düsseldorf studio, 1980, color photography, 100 × 150 cm

FRANZ WEST, *Untitled*
(detail from *Unsere Eisenbahner und ihre Gewerkschaft*, featuring Meuser), 1989, mixed media, 31 × 57 cm



maybe.' Sometimes Imi came along. And I really dove in, emotionally. Whether it was smelly, broken, greasy, or dirty, I could block all of that out. I was 28 years old and I knew, 'Now I'll stick with it.'"

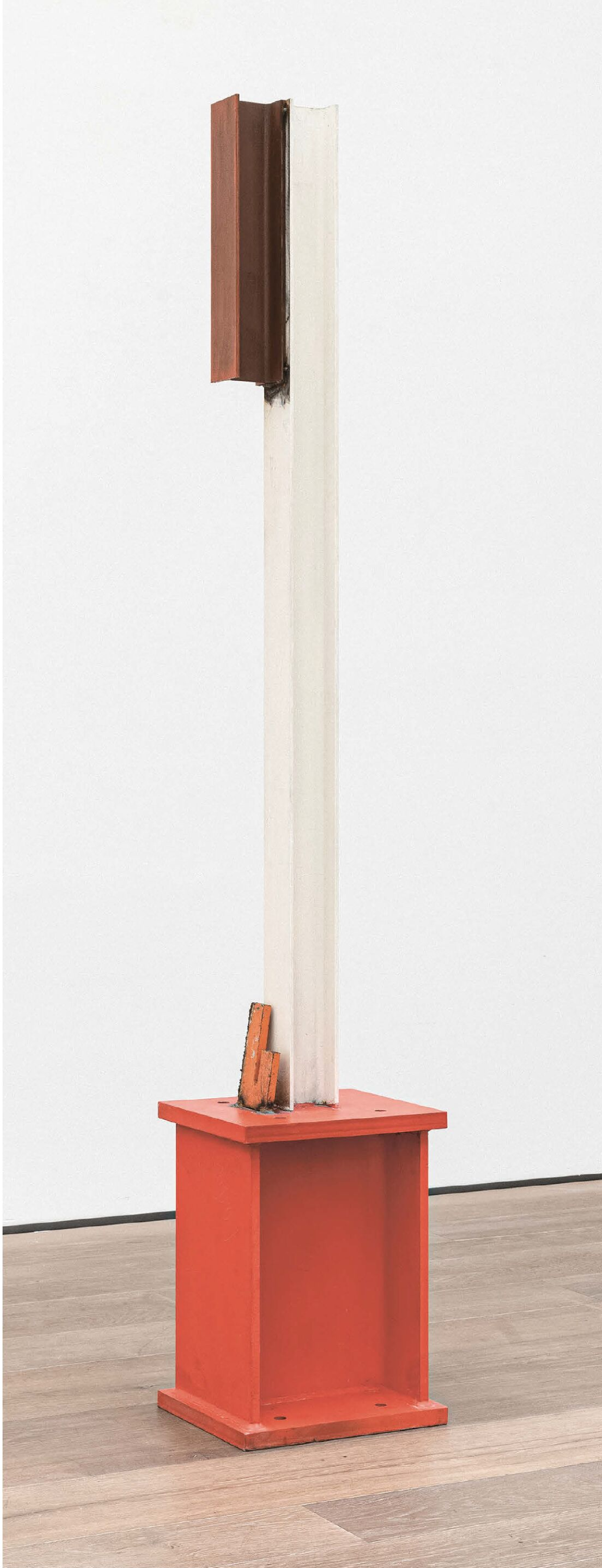
An unused corner of a truck workshop in Düsseldorf became his first studio, the place where he brought his scrapyard findings, treating them to the smallest of interventions: sawing something off here, welding something on there, a slap of paint—done. He quickly turned out to be a gifted colorist, introducing industrial non-colors, such as reddish railway brown or bluish shipping-container gray, to the history of monochrome art. "Definitely colors that Mondrian would have denounced me for."

Even though he found himself repeatedly explaining to the truck drivers at the workshop that he himself didn't know what he was doing, Meuser was no longer perplexed. Suddenly, his newly-fledged work was not only in dialogue with Knoebel and Palermo, but also with the Russian constructivists, with Tony Smith, Anthony Caro, Michael Heizer, and Ellsworth Kelly—although admittedly his contribution came in a vernacular that was unmistakably industrial Ruhr.

The distance from the academy, from Beuys's self-mythologizations, was good for Meuser

Beuys's shadow was also getting shorter. The distance from the academy, from the master's self-mythologizations, was good for Meuser. "I remember going on a bike ride with Imi along the Lower Rhine, and as soon as we got out of Kleve, Beuys's hometown, there was a huge aluminum crate by the side of the country road. And what did it say? 'Rama Margarine.' Of course, we laughed our heads off at that. We all knew Beuys's story of crashing his plane in Crimea and only surviving because he was wrapped in felt and fat by Tatar tribesmen. But Beuys had never mentioned the fact that there was a margarine factory just outside his hometown."

Meuser is getting tired. Sticking to one subject goes against his nature, when he could just as easily talk about the debts of a famous German gallerist ("chronically hypoglycemic, always has been"), the ex-wife of an artist colleague ("an only child, unfortunately"), or his Achilles tendon ("totally fucked up"). To reset, we head out to Pomodoro, the local Italian place, where Markus Lüpertz is said to have taken Chancellor Gerhard Schröder during his Karlsruhe days. Meuser climbs into a battered Mercedes SUV and at the first intersection



MORGENLATTE, 1994, steel, rust primer, 236 × 40 × 35 cm asks me to pay attention to the traffic for him. His eyesight is not what it used to be, plus, after the excavator operator’s fuck-up, he very much feels like “crashing into something.”

“Don’t you have enough?” he says, before starting off on a tangent about the city’s construction issues and the local building authorities’ worrying state of mind. From 1992 until the summer of 2015, he taught here at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste, commuting back and forth from Düsseldorf until he met his second wife, Christine, in Karlsruhe. “The market suddenly was no longer interested,” he says, “I looked at my bank statement, thought about my children, and became a professor.” At Pomodoro, however, Meuser remains *il professore*. And since it’s nice enough to sit outside, he can crack open his second pack of cigarettes and tell the story of the second decisive encounter in his artist’s life.

“I looked at my bank statement, thought about my children, and became a professor”

“Oh, how I loved Kippenberger! Kippi and I were from the same city. It wasn’t his work that attracted me at first. It was more a matter of sociology, stupidity, friendship. Back then I thought you couldn’t really do the stuff he was doing.”

“What do you mean?”

“He had inherited 400,000 marks’ worth of Bayer shares from his grandmother—a crazy sum at the time—which he spent completely in just two years. In Berlin, when he wasn’t putting on concerts at SO36, he would be in his ‘office,’ a studio-cum-gallery on Segitzdamm. Behind his huge desk were four portraits: a tram driver, a GDR chick wearing a hat with a star on it—things like that. And I said, ‘But you can’t do that.’ I wasn’t sure if this was the way art should be going, and he just went, ‘Yes, yes I can. These are the bright believers of the public service.’”

At the invitation of his new friend, Meuser’s second solo exhibition took place in 1979 at Kippenberger’s office. “No need to talk about my first show. It went so badly that I was crying at a bar afterwards, and girls kept giving me hugs and saying, ‘It wasn’t *that* bad.’” For his second endeavor, Kippenberger even managed to get press. “I can only remember the headline: Meuser against Mondrian, which of course was Kippi’s fault. He had fed that line to the journalist.” Meuser retaliated by telling Kippenberger not to get bogged down in actionism and instead “paint all that shit you have in your head.”

The resulting paintings were offered to Max Hetzler, still operating his Stuttgart gallery at the time, who graciously refused, until, that is, he “realized that another Stuttgart gallery owner, Hans-Jürgen Müller, had bought six of Kippi’s paintings.”

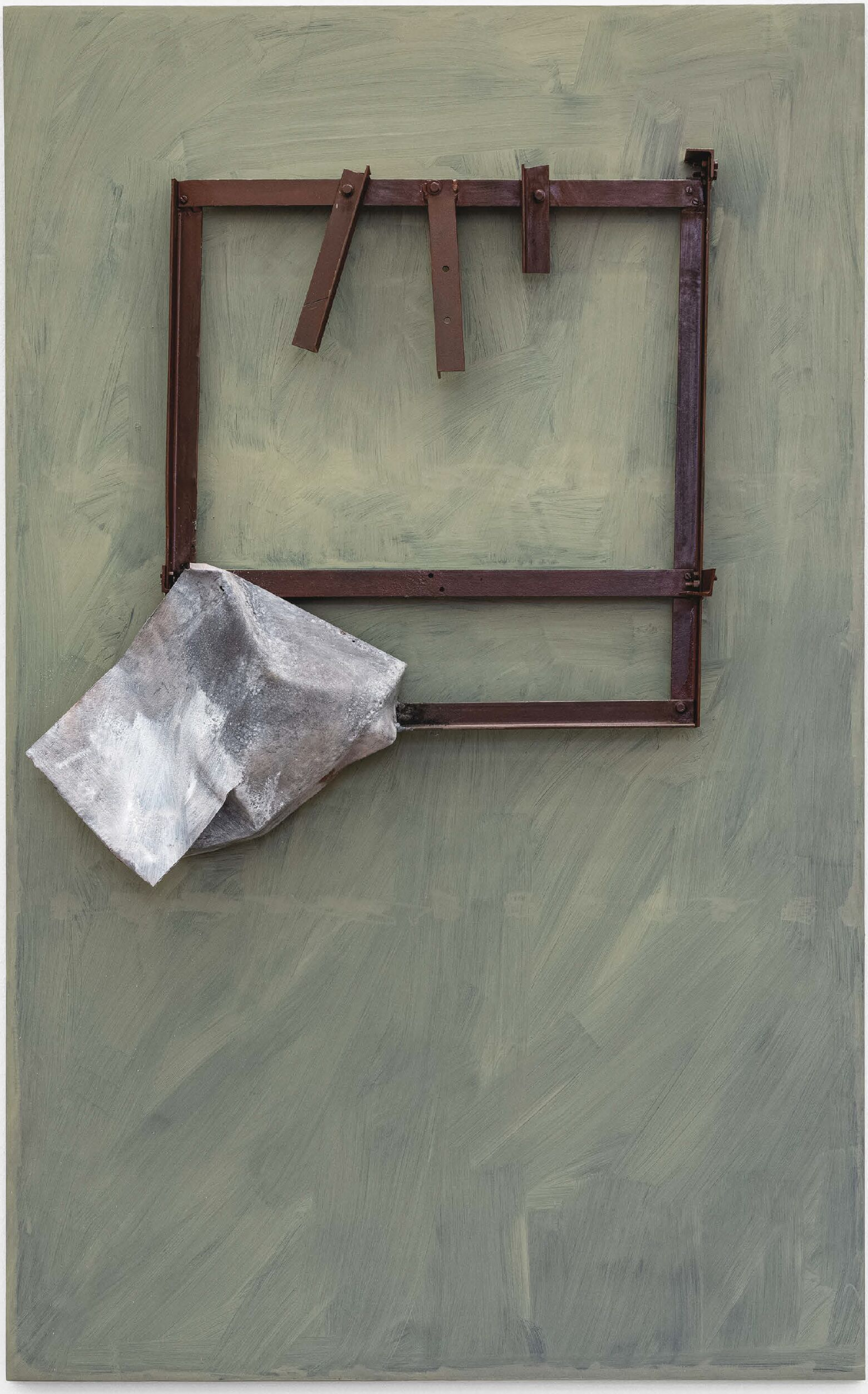
In October 1981, Kippenberger opened his first exhibition with Max Hetzler, called *The Secret of Success by Mr. A. Onassis: Invest in Oil*. It would not only prove consequential to German art history, but also to Meuser. On the eve of the opening, Kippenberger summoned his friend to “knock out some titles.” “Gallerist Bärbel Grässlin came in and listened to us brainstorming a while. Then she just walked out, saying, ‘These two are crazy.’ But she wasn’t feeling well, anyway. Food poisoning, from a very fine fish restaurant on the Wallersee.” After that night, he knew: “I want that for my work too. Until then, my works had always been untitled; I came from the 1970s. But I noticed that life is more fun when you dive into things textually too. And people are also very grateful when their first encounter with the work is not completely dry.”

Kippenberger’s show sold out, and Max Hetzler gradually brought the friends of his new star on board too. “Albert Oehlen was already there. Then Werner Büttner, me, and of course Georg Herold, who immediately pushed Max into this brutal show where he tied Camembert cheeses to a heater with wire. As you can imagine, Max was totally enthusiastic.” And while the legend of the “Hetzler Boys” grew, Meuser was working on his new formula for success—until at some point, he quite naturally hung an orange-painted steel frame on a wall, and called it *AEG (Aufhängen, Einschalten, Geht Nicht)* (AEG [Hang It Up, Switch It On, Doesn’t Work]).

The 1980s, he says, were “successful, at least phenomenologically,” as solo and important group exhibitions followed at ever-shorter intervals. Among them was 1985’s *Günther Förg, Georg Herold, Hubert Kiecol, Meuser, Reinhard Mucha*, a show organized by Kippenberger at Peter Pakesch’s gallery in Vienna. Artist-curator Peter Weibel contributed an essay to its catalogue, setting the bar very high under the header “Spatial Sculpture”: “Förg, Kiecol, Meuser, Herold, and Mucha are a heroic team, heralds of sculpture who achieve a strikingly direct effect with the utmost precision, steering the medium to a place that is theirs, the ‘place-space’ (*topos*).” In Vienna, Meuser also met Franz West, who immediately incorporated photos of his new friend into collages and 15 years later would top Meuser’s *Gucci* (1998) with a work of his own titled, *Meuser, Extended* (2000).

As much as it has become a cliché to proclaim someone an artists’ artist, after four decades on the scrapyard, Meuser has become just that. Andreas Gursky raves about how unique Meuser’s combination of sculptural rationality and absurd humor is, how important his conversations with his older friend were to him as a young photographer, and the fact that, aside

RED KEIN BLECH, 2023, steel, oil paint, 102 × 74 × 18 cm
Following spread: VÖLLIG KNÜLLE (detail), 2022, steel, oil paint, 70 × 86 × 32 cm



from his teacher Bernd Becher, meeting Meuser was one of the most decisive moments in his career. Even today, Gursky asks himself, "What would Meuser say?"

Katja Strunz tells me she came to Karlsruhe to study philosophy with Peter Sloterdijk, but found it a blessing to end up in Meuser's class instead: "He truly lets the material live, lets connections speak. This honesty and directness in his translation process really grounded me, and it still impresses me a great deal."

Michail Pirgelis calls Meuser's 2006 exhibition at Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, *The Woman Rides and the Horse Goes on Foot*, a key experience. Like no other sculptor, he notes, Meuser manages to create the lightest objects out of the heaviest substances. This is an incredible achievement: "When I see that, my heart starts beating faster."

By now it's late afternoon, and the artist has been persuaded to let me take a peek at the new work in his studio. Meuser, who obviously drives an SUV so he can cut across sidewalks during right-hand turns, drives us toward Rheinhafen Karlsruhe industrial estate. Considering his colleagues' adulation, the long list of exhibitions in Germany's leading galleries, his participation in Documenta IX and shows in Mexico, Zurich, New York, Stockholm—isn't he surprised that he still has the status of a best-kept secret? Meuser grazes the curb again and says, as if he'd never thought about it before, "I certainly never cut in line." But he cannot complain either. "Forty years ago, a kilo of scrap metal cost 50 pfennigs, and now it's still just 50 cents. Compared to that, my life has been much more eventful."

And then we're in his studio, a predictably dreary room behind a loading ramp that, compared to his corner in the truck workshop, must have once seemed palatial. Four finished works hang on the wall, a dented wheelbarrow in front of it. Meuser considers which works he should send to his gallerist. A pried-open leaden sack seems to have been set, yellow-gray paint drizzled over its plaster residue, so that the metal is now reminiscent of tanned skin and appears to breathe. "That one's good," he says, as he lights another cigarette.

"Is it true," I ask as I take my leave, "that Kippenberger created this theory of what makes a really good exhibition on the basis of your show at Kunsthalle Zürich?"

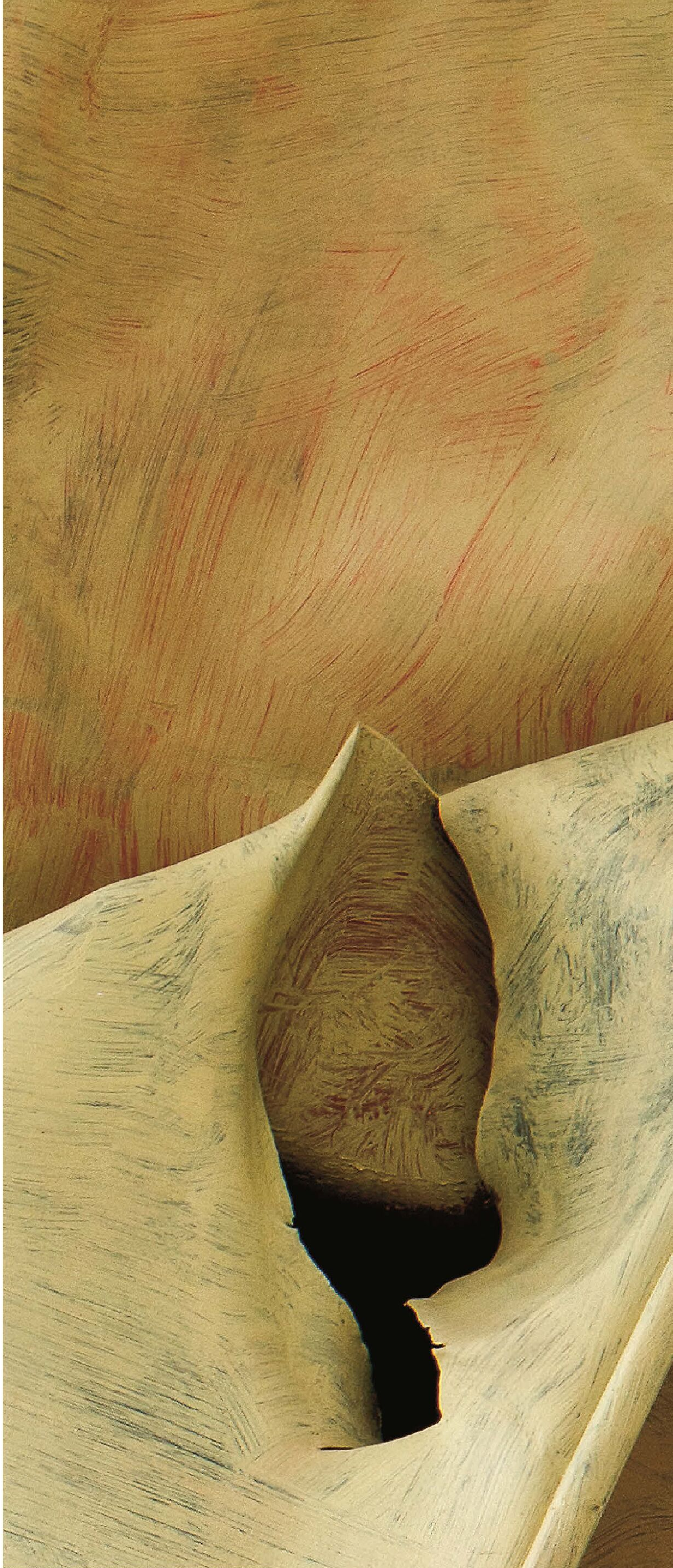
"And what would that theory be?"

"I was told Kippenberger complained that the work in it was *too* good, that a really good exhibition always needs one or two bad works that make the others shine in comparison."

"Could be."

"At Bärbel Grässlin, there was one pretty bad piece."

"I think I know which one you mean." Meuser takes another puff. "Not intentional," he says. "My daughter came to the scrapyard with me and found the piece. She was so proud of herself—what was I supposed to say?"



THE HOUSE OF EYCKERMANS

Fearlessly confronting a legacy that can at times feel overbearing, *Bendt Eyckermans* has turned the Antwerp studio of his late grandfather into an ever-changing incubator for his own work. Photography *François Halard*

How I came to have this studio in Antwerp, the story begins nine years ago. I had just graduated from art school and was looking for somewhere to work, when suddenly I remembered my grandfather's old place. Of course, I knew he had been a great artist: Lode Eyckermans won the Prix de Rome in 1942 and would later meet, and be influenced by, Henry Moore. After his death in 1998, his sculpture studio had been used to store furniture that my family members neither wanted to discard nor keep in their homes. It had been 10 years since I was there last, but as soon as I walked in, I was immediately struck by the skylights. "Never," I thought, "will I be able to find that kind of light anywhere else."

The place was crumbling and I had to do a few small renovations: new wiring, a new roof—in the rain, it was literally a sieve—extra lighting, too, although I only paint in daylight. Step by step, I got rid of the remaining clutter, which didn't seem to serve any useful purpose, and now it's become a space where I can really work as a painter.

The studio is in a rear building, completely closed off from the street, in Antwerp's Orthodox-Jewish quarter, a neighborhood where time has stood still. On arrival, you pass through a big wooden gate and immediately emerge into a green courtyard, into a different era. You completely forget the busy city outside. Consisting of two stories, the redbrick property has an especially large ground floor, making it an ideal sculpture studio, not only for my grandfather but also for earlier generations. Here and elsewhere in Belgium, five generations of my family have, over time, produced so many objects—sculpture, art, ornaments, and furniture—that just walking through the streets of Antwerp, one sees them everywhere. And this history is one that is also encapsulated by the studio itself.

A kind of collector's cave, it has always been a place where inspirations convene: limbs, noses, penises, breasts. It's a time capsule, but it also documents all those different lives lived in the visual arts. There is a sculpture made up of demons, for example, created to support a balcony overlooking the Transvaalstraat, and my great-grandfather sculpted each demon based on one of his brothers.

My own memories of this building go back quite a long way. I wandered around here as a toddler, and in my youth, I was always helping my father build a model or repair a sculpture. Ingmar Bergman's film *Fanny and Alexander* (1982) reminds me of this place, not only in the way the family flaunts their art in all its colorful splendor—before it falls into disrepair and *tristesse*—but especially in the scene where a young Alexander nods off under a table and dreams that a white marble statue is beckoning him to come closer.

As a child, I started to make up stories as a way to get to know the people who made the beautiful, mysterious paintings, sculptures, and pieces of furniture surrounding me. After all, I never knew them: before the last of them, my grandfather, died, I was still too young to have a meaningful conversation with him. Perhaps what has shaped my own visual language the most is not so much the lives they led, but the work they left behind.

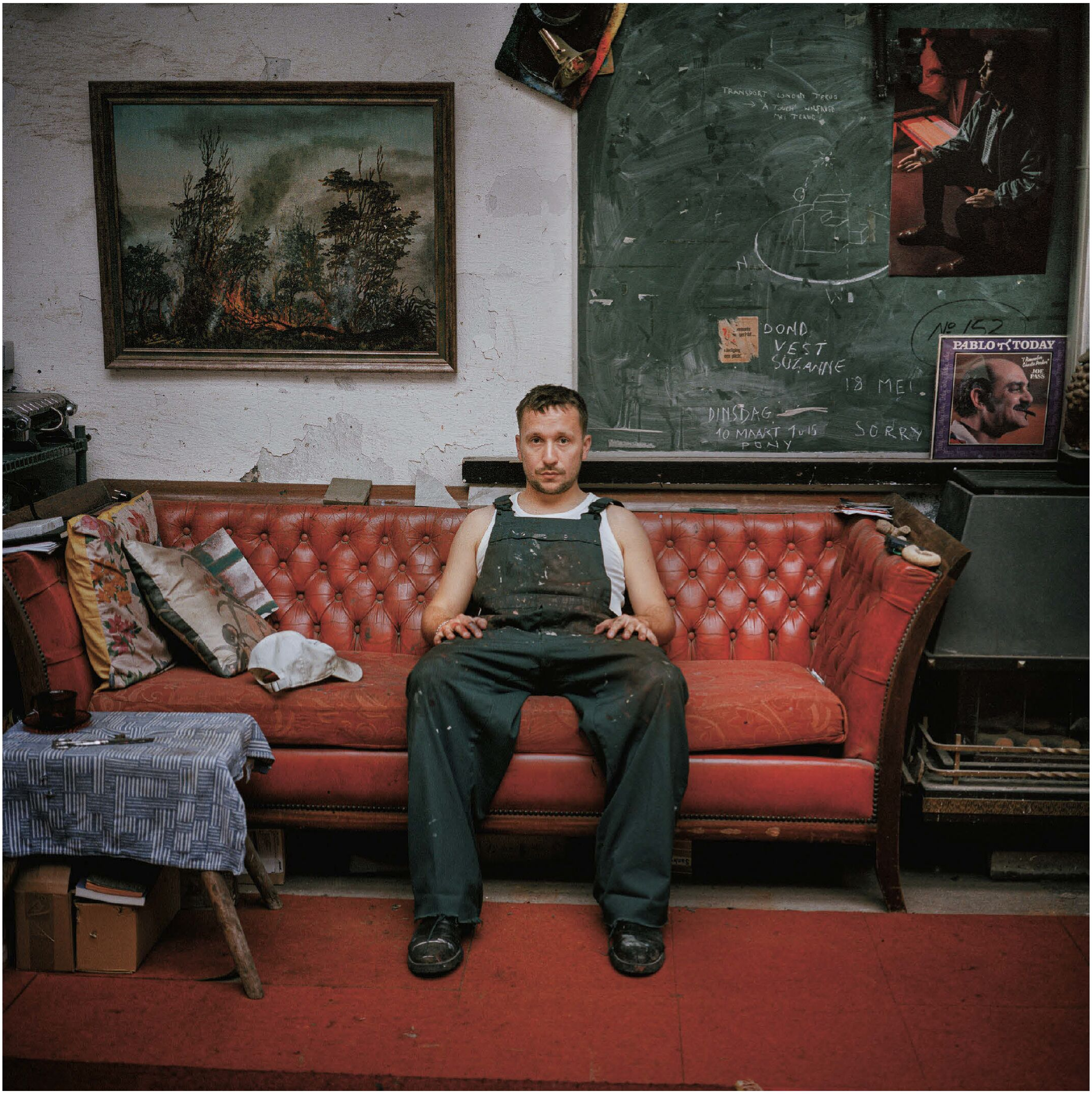
I use these objects to communicate my own ideas, influences, experiences—anything that feels important enough to convey thematically or conceptually in my painting. All that history is already here, but I also collect a lot from flea markets and auctions. Primarily, I look for work by my ancestors—including my grandmother, who also painted—and their teachers, artists who have shaped my visual language and served as sources of inspiration. Collecting these influences, I intertwine them, building, questioning, and reshaping the legacy of fragments left behind.

The pieces I have the greatest affinity with, the most intriguing ones, are studies for sculptures, or works that remain incomplete. For an artist, there is nothing more powerful than leaving work behind. It has a kind of sentimentality, knowing a person was making things right up until the last day of their life, but it is also energizing to get to see how someone thought, how they shaped an idea—to glimpse the person behind the great artist.

I constantly move these objects around too, to ensure that every space changes, while still feeling like everything *belongs*. I really enjoy playing with that. And of course, those elements come through in my work as a painter. But unlike a museum or a mausoleum, the studio is more like a library of visual elements that I'm continually expanding.

On some days, however, that can feel oppressive, like getting stuck in a kind of identity prison. Because in the end, these remnants are the lives of others, not mine. Some of these pieces are also incredibly charged, and my ancestors certainly depicted women in ways we wouldn't today—they were all of their time. But other days, the possibilities feel endless. It's then that I start putting together all manner of assemblages from different pieces of furniture or sculpture. In these moments, this place feels like a bottomless well of inspiration. It all depends on my state of mind, but the process itself is already productive, raising questions rather than simply tracing family trees.

I have taught myself to dig my own way out of, or through, this legacy. And that dynamic has become very much fundamental to my approach as a painter, my hope being that my specific visual language in turn prompts a kind of questioning for the viewer, allowing the image to grow beyond the limits of the canvas. My ultimate goal with the building, then, is to create something unique—someplace beyond a showroom, a stage where people can not only step into all of the different stories the space holds but also re-engage with the contemporary. An environment that other artists and curators are invited into, where they can develop their own distinct dialogue with all of the history that lies within.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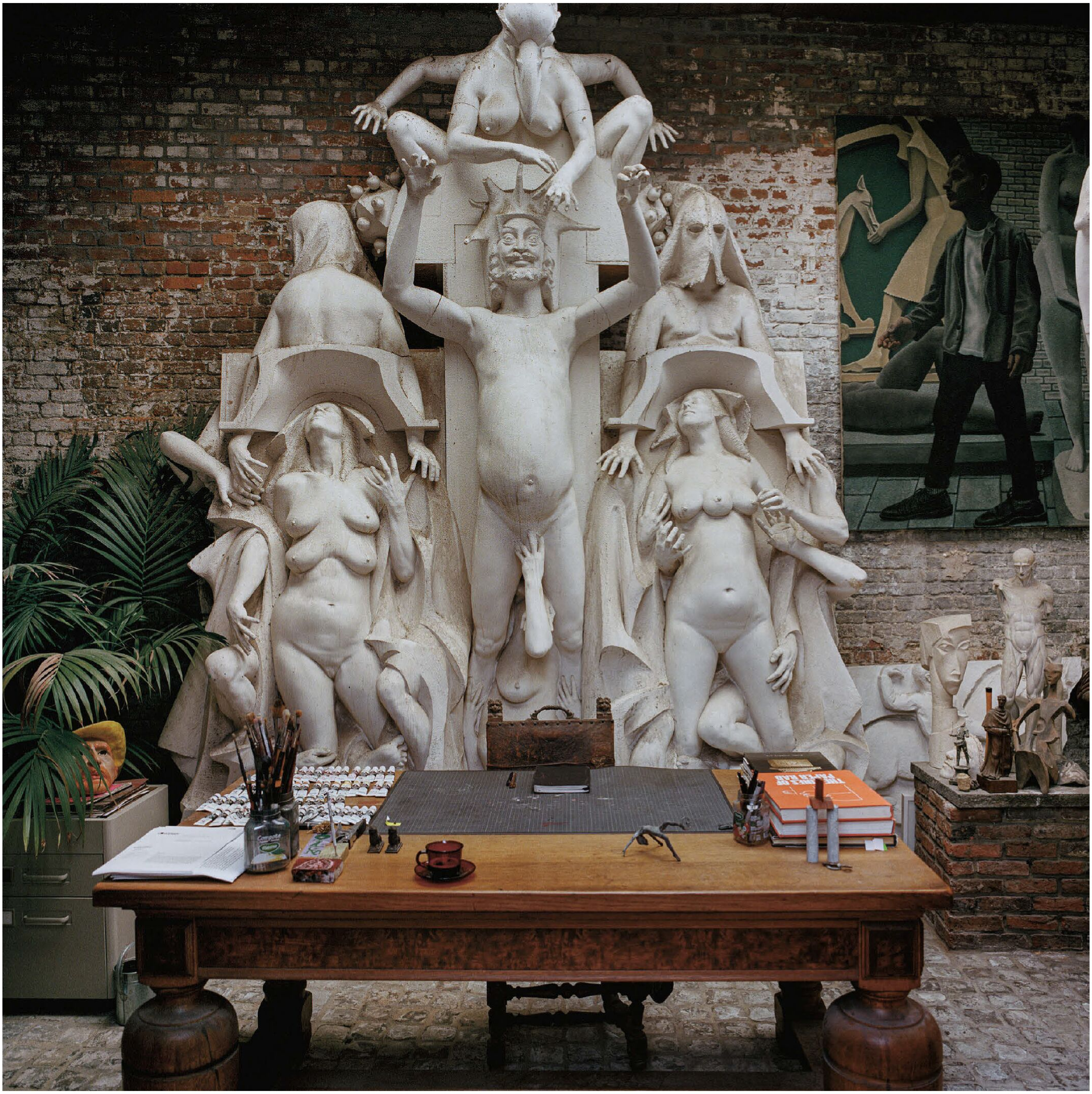
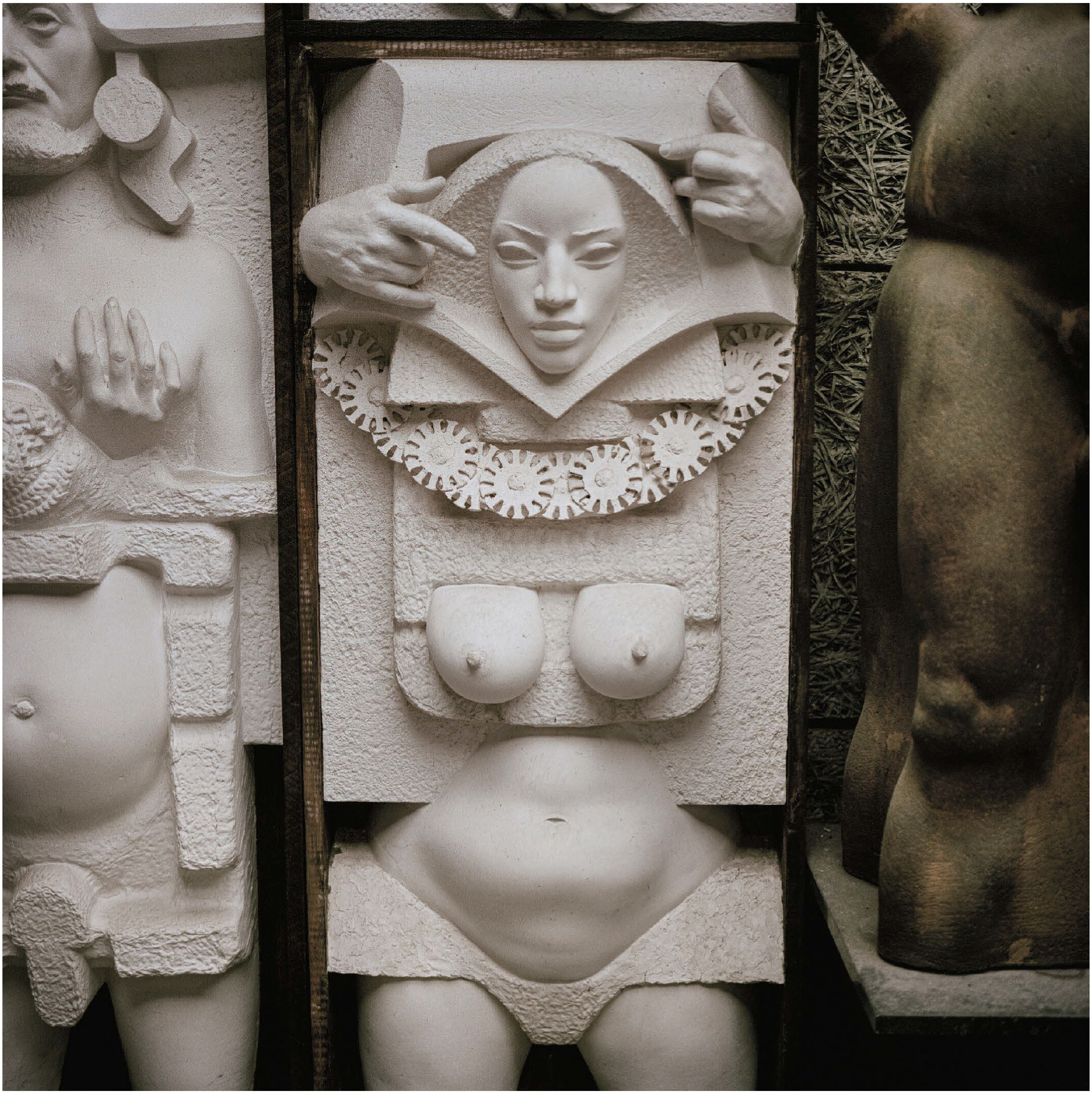
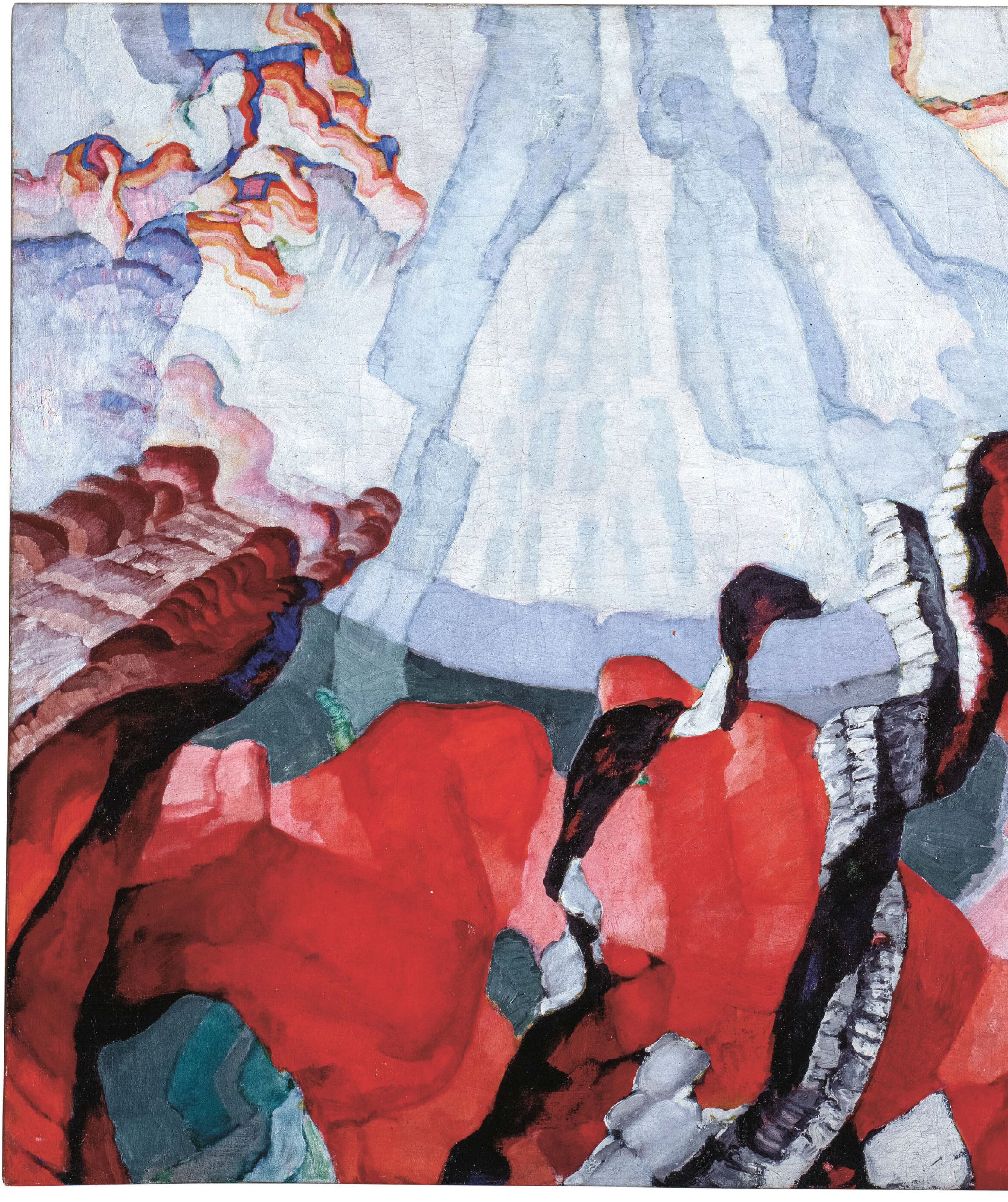
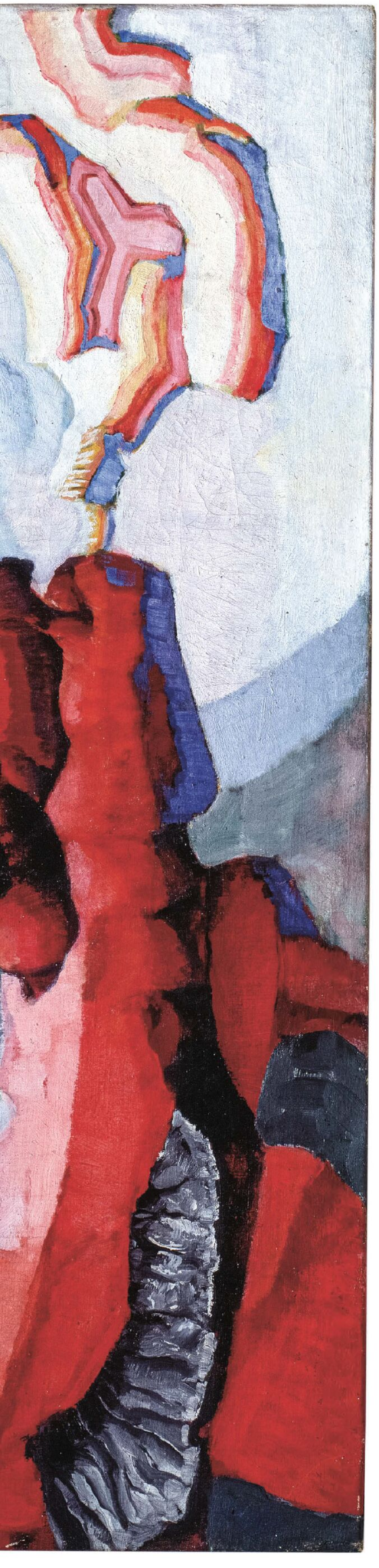




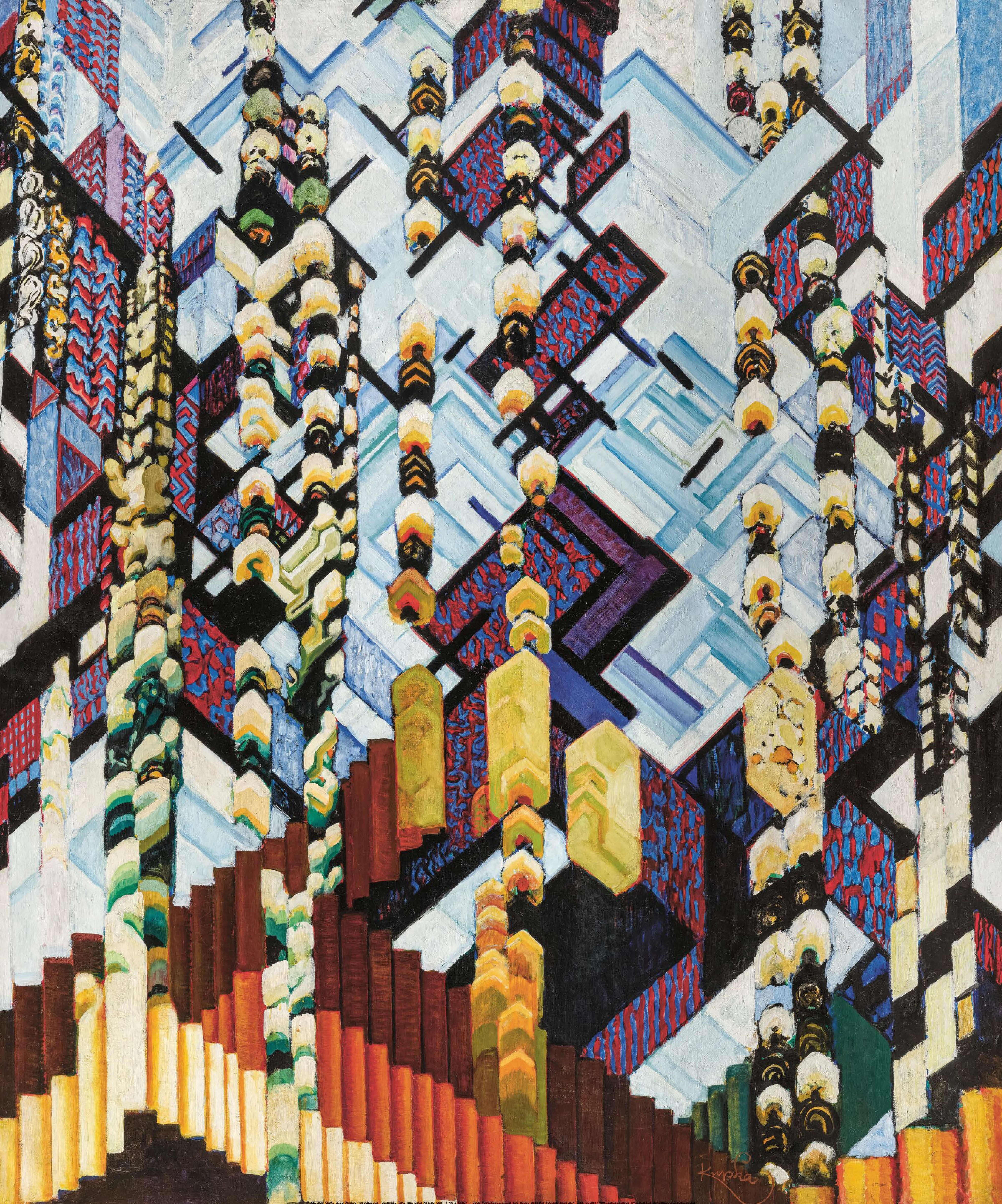


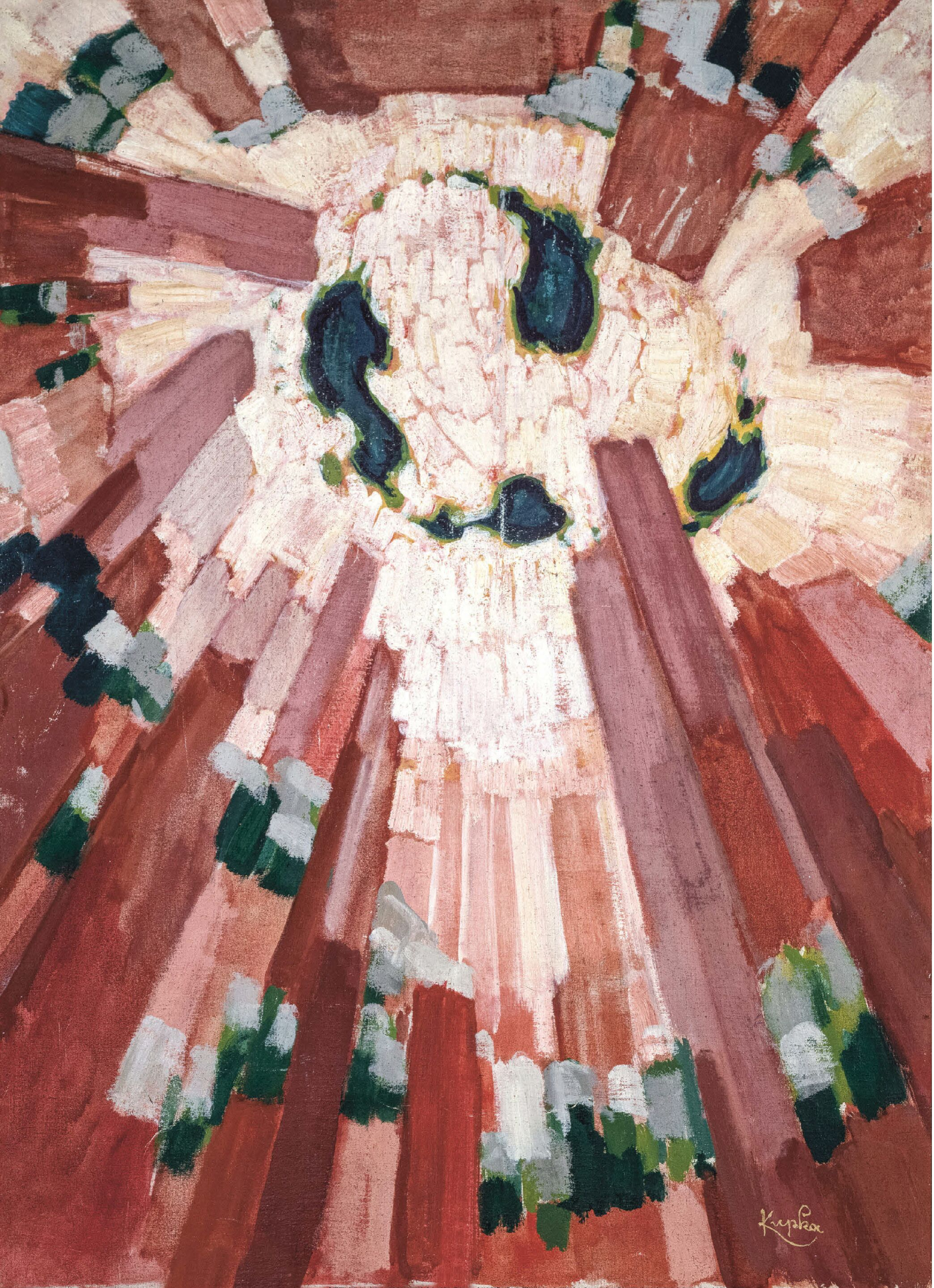


FRANTIŠEK KUPKA

Words by
HANS-JOACHIM
MÜLLER

Communard, spiritual medium, and poster artist for the Montmartre set, FRANTIŠEK KUPKA nervously rode the sea changes of the early 20th century—before setting out in truth. Conjuring some of the first-ever abstract paintings, he treated color like notes in a musical score, composing symphonies of light and shape, and laying bare the very mechanisms behind creation. Why didn't he get to wear the same laurels as Malevich and Kandinsky, asks *Hans-Joachim Müller:* It might have been Kupka's casual manner, painting as if it all had suddenly appeared to him from behind a cloud





THE PRIMITIVE, 1912–13, oil on canvas, 100 × 73 cm

No one knows what exactly happened on that wedding night. What is clear, however, is that Karl Wilhelm Diefenbach fled up a mountainside and stayed there, atop the 1,000-meter-high Hohe Peissenberg, until dawn. And when the sun rose over Upper Bavaria, he had an epiphany—from that point on, he would live his difficult life barefooted.

This was in the last stretch of the 19th century, back when men grew beards and startled at the prospect of becoming a bourgeois success story. Never again would there be such a mass of prophets. After all, this was also when Nietzsche's cowled Zarathustra came down from his mountain of enlightenment in Jesus sandals to preach his blasphemies, while in cities the first psychotherapists spoke of irritable weakness, of neurasthenia. Women fainted; men fled on their wedding night. There has always been a thin line between sickness and art.

Diefenbach was an artist. Like Arnold Böcklin, whom he greatly admired, he painted with pathos and power. He gathered disciples who shared his vows of vegetarianism, his recipes for self-improvement, and his phobia of wedding nights. One of them, František Kupka, had come from Opočno in Eastern Bohemia (now the Czech Republic). Kupka was artistically gifted and extremely susceptible to promises of a new kind of life outside the bounds of society. He even practiced as a spiritualist medium, a profession that has been completely forgotten. From his early years a few colored etchings survive, fantasies of the mysterious inception of life itself. Water-lily petals, lotus flowers, and spherical uteri—all very magical, vaguely swampy, and not at all in accordance with the biblical account of creation. Fueled by the grand theories of then-fashionable theosophy, that, too, had become part of this generation of artists' conspiracies and ascetic customs. "I have this sense," Kupka later wrote, "that a new life can open up to me, but always from the other shore, across a dark expanse." In one photograph, wearing a turban and a thin cloak, the almost 30-year-old artist looks like John the Baptist in his desert phase.

Still, we need not imagine this alternative lifestyle as too strict. Soon Kupka left his master, who was now living with several women yet still demanding unconditional abstinence from his male acolytes. The Czech artist traveled a lot: Prague, Munich, Paris, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, London, then back to Paris. He earned a pretty penny making portraits and genre pictures liberally dusted with Symbolism, which was entirely to the taste of a turn-of-the-century audience miles away from modernism.

Kupka also painted nude pixies doing gymnastics on horseback on a deserted beach. "All of us," he jotted down, "have a desire for joy, for some pure immaterial feeling of well-being. I want everyone who sees the picture to experience such feelings." The fin de siècle seemed to digest it all equally well: poppies à la Monet, ravens à la Van Gogh, bathers à la Renoir, absinthe drinkers à la Degas, card players à la Cézanne. *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884–86), as spotted by Georges Seurat, fit the menu just as well as Manet's grassy luncheon with unclad women and clothed men. At that celebration, Kupka's pixies were served as dessert.

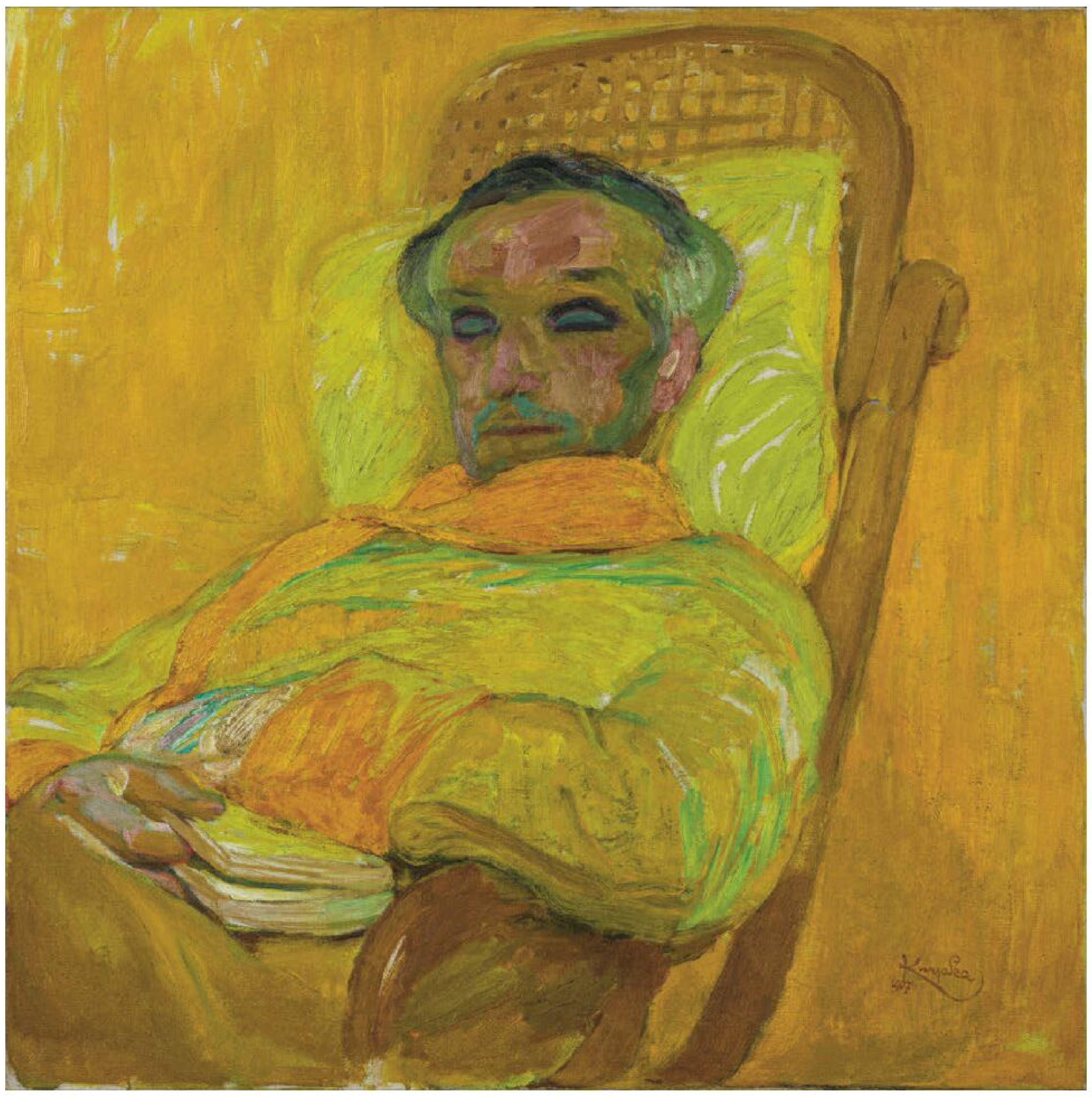
And though the painter was at first just a busboy in the French art world's gourmet kitchen, still plating up Diefenbach-inspired dishes, he soon made a name for himself designing posters for nightclubs in Montmartre and for living practically next door to Aristide Bruant's famous cabaret, Le Chat Noir. Seen in this way, it is entirely understandable why he plucked his pixies—whom friends claim closely resemble two of his mistresses, one past, one present—from their mounts and instead staged a lovely choreography in the nude. *Deux Danseuses* of 1905 looks ripe for the Moulin Rouge. Nearby in Montmartre was the creaking Bateau-Lavoir, where Picasso had a studio and, after his Rose Period, made his bold first efforts toward cubist decomposition. And a bit farther away, in distant Dresden, four architecture students formed Die Brücke—that avant-garde artist group that would henceforth celebrate painting as a way of wresting freedom from the establishment.

"I have this sense that a new life can open up to me, but always from the other shore, across a dark expanse"

It is important to remember such sea changes if one wants to do justice to Kupka's idiosyncratic evolution. Unlike Picasso, who was driven from one style to the next in an effort to reinvent visual art, devise new forms, and generally upstage everyone else, the Czech painter was compelled by no such motivations. Not then and not later, when critics classed him among the masters of early modernism. He was never attached to any "school," did not belong anywhere. He simply followed his own path, albeit a sometimes rocky one. For quite a while, his female subjects lolled under fruit-bearing trees naked as they came, lost their dancers' slenderness, took on baroque proportions, or presented themselves as conventionally bourgeois as his wife, Eugénie Straub, whom he confidently painted as if he'd produced nothing but impressionist portraiture all his young life.

Despite the artist's clear curiosity, perceptiveness, and attention, the resulting work is undoubtedly anchored in

Opening spread: CREATION, 1911–20, oil on canvas, 115 × 125 cm
Previous spread left: Portrait of František Kupka, 1928
Previous spread right: COLOR PLANES, WINTER REMINISCENCES, 1915–23, oil on canvas, 180 × 150 cm



THE BLUE SHAPE, 1913–14, oil on canvas, 73 × 60cm
Left: LA GAMME JAUNE, 1907, oil on canvas, 79 × 79cm

tradition. How did Kupka ultimately let all the turn-of-the-century's precipitous artistic revolutions, all that Babylonian upheaval, simply pass him by?

The first crack appeared in a very strange picture from 1907. A man in a wicker armchair, his rictus that of a death mask, his hands marking a page in a closed book. And it's all yellow. A very curious yellow. Which is why the picture is called *La Gamme Jaune*, meaning: the yellow scale or palette. The title likely refers to Michel-Eugène Chevreul's scientific work on contrasting colors, popular in artistic circles at the time, which describes a "yellow-orange chromatic scale." In any case, Kupka's subject looks like he is suffocating amid all that scrambled-egg yellow. Given that the artist was well-versed in portraiture, one does not want to assume it a mere picture of the poet Charles Baudelaire, as some have suggested. Obviously, Kupka was interested only in the color itself, distributing it so subtly, brightening and darkening it as if he wanted to paint just that, yellow, in all its nuances, all the notes of its scale.

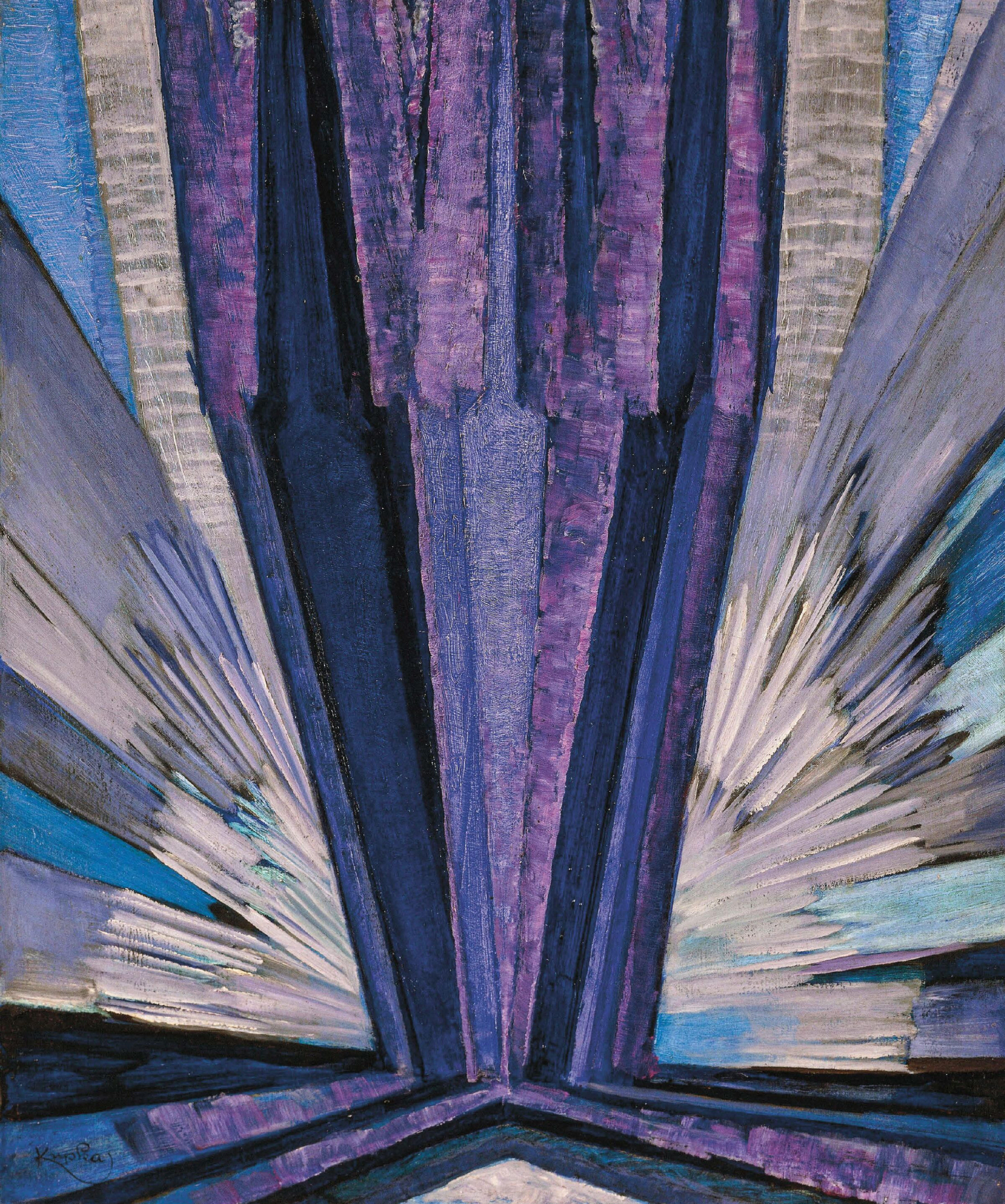
It is a lot. When the picture was shown at Paris's Salon d'Automne in 1910, one critic wrote, "It is outrageous that the flesh of the face in Monsieur Kepka's portrait is forced to assert itself against all the violent yellow surrounding it." Which is hard to argue with, even if the critic was apparently so outraged he failed to note down the correct name listed next to said violent yellow. In any case, his handiwork was now in the press, and his friend, K.E. Schmidt, who had made a name for himself as a world traveler, soap boiler, gold digger, sailor, and editor, published a novel with the beautiful title *Artists and Knots*, in which Kupka plays a major role.

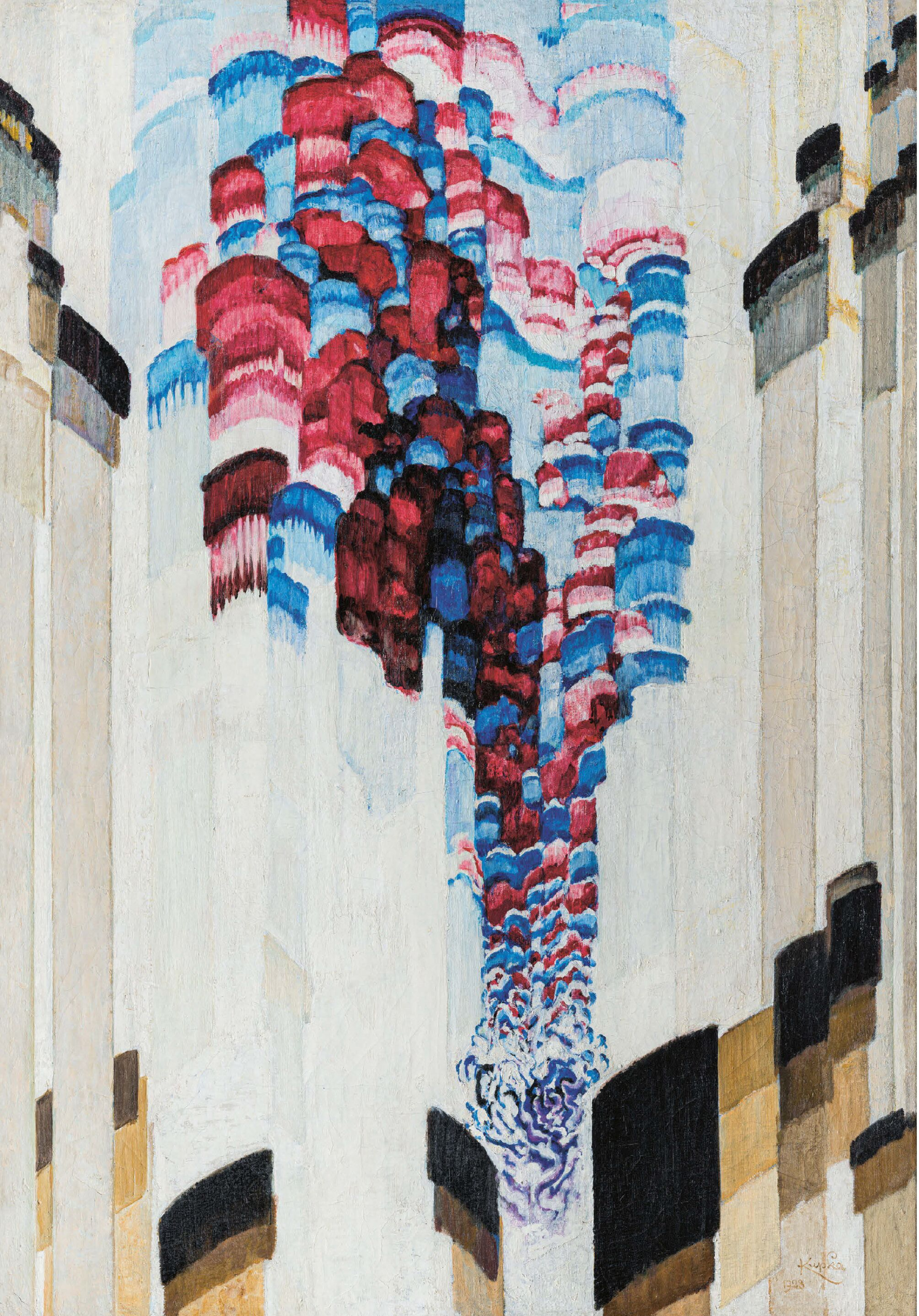
Much more crucial, of course, was that Kupka himself started to theoretically back his pictorial art, which began to revolve more and more around color. Between 1907 and 1913, he kept working on *La Création dans les Arts Plastiques*, the book becoming in time a kind of monograph on his artistic convictions. Most of this effort is dedicated to the effusive praise of color: "To start this chapter on colors fills us with great joy, and we are therefore tempted to praise the infinite charms of this world; it is as if the sun, after being obscured by clouds, suddenly reappeared and awakened us to gloriously luminous life again. It is a true joy to perceive colors and celebrate life through them."

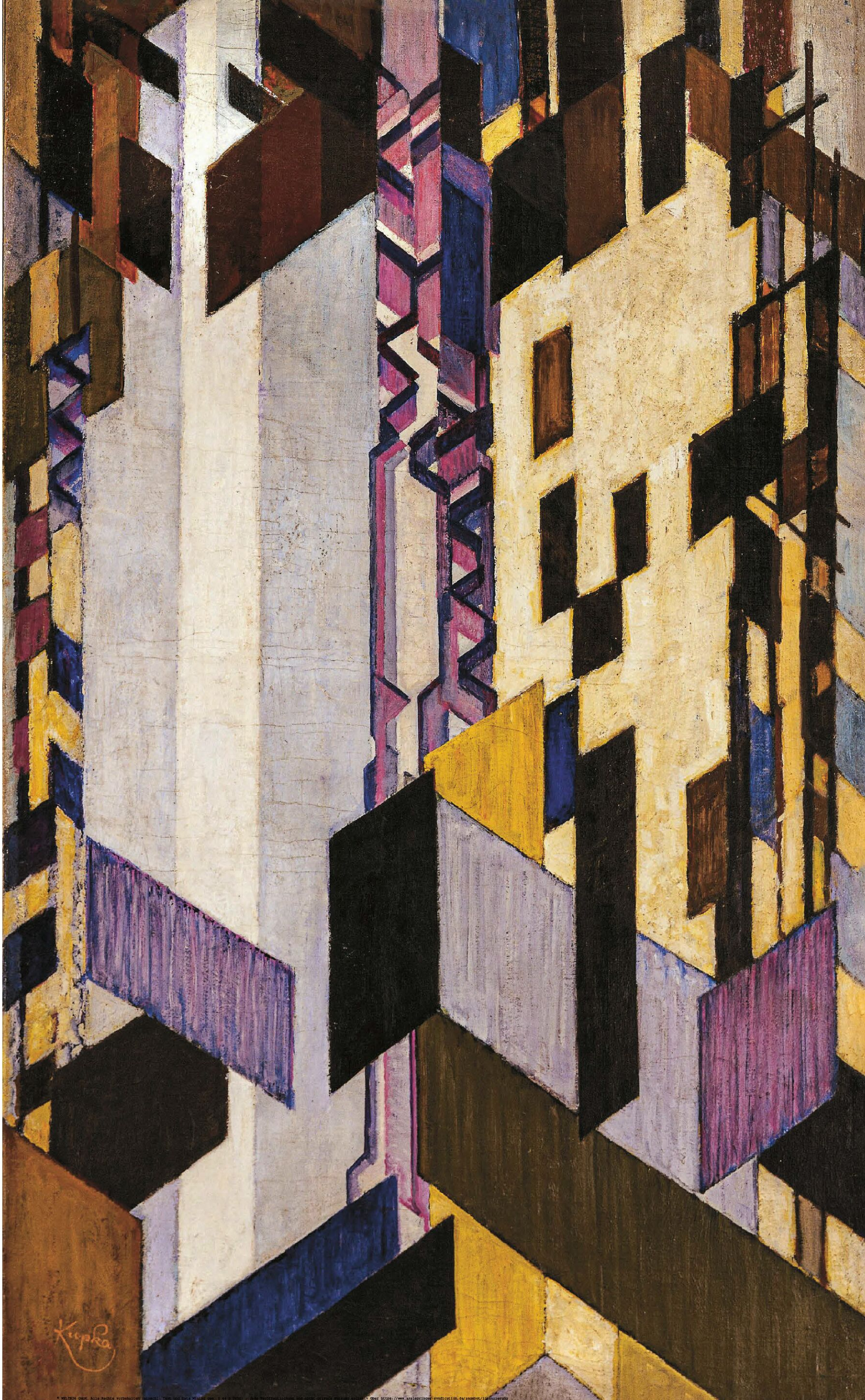
It was this discovery of color, this insatiable desire for its incandescent potential, that would accompany his work from then on—until the mid-1950s, when it faded into constructivist geometry. Some have claimed the soft-colored pastels Kupka created after the yellow-drunk *Gamme Jaune* come close to futurism. And it also has been proven that Kupka was very familiar with the Italians' manifesto and its violent glorification of motorized modern life. But he never painted any movement studies. The moving figures in his pictures are nothing more than shadows scurrying through measures of pigment. And from there it was only a small step to completely clearing the stage, spurning figures and objects entirely, and devoting himself solely to the interplay of color. Is it a sin he celebrated that discovery a little lyrically? Think back to the sun and its willingness to awaken us to gloriously luminous life again.

After all, the discovery of pictorial abstraction is most often depicted as a muscular act of will, as liberation from the constraints of representation, from the shackles of narrative logic; as an irrevocable farewell to the depictable world and a reconciliation of the seen with the unseen, the latter not infrequently becoming the last resort. And in a way, the abstract image has thus always served to illustrate a cultural history of progress as it accompanies the modern era. Kupka's paintings pop a spanner in that project. They are not hard-won or forced; they simply appeared, just like the sun can suddenly emerge from behind a cloud.

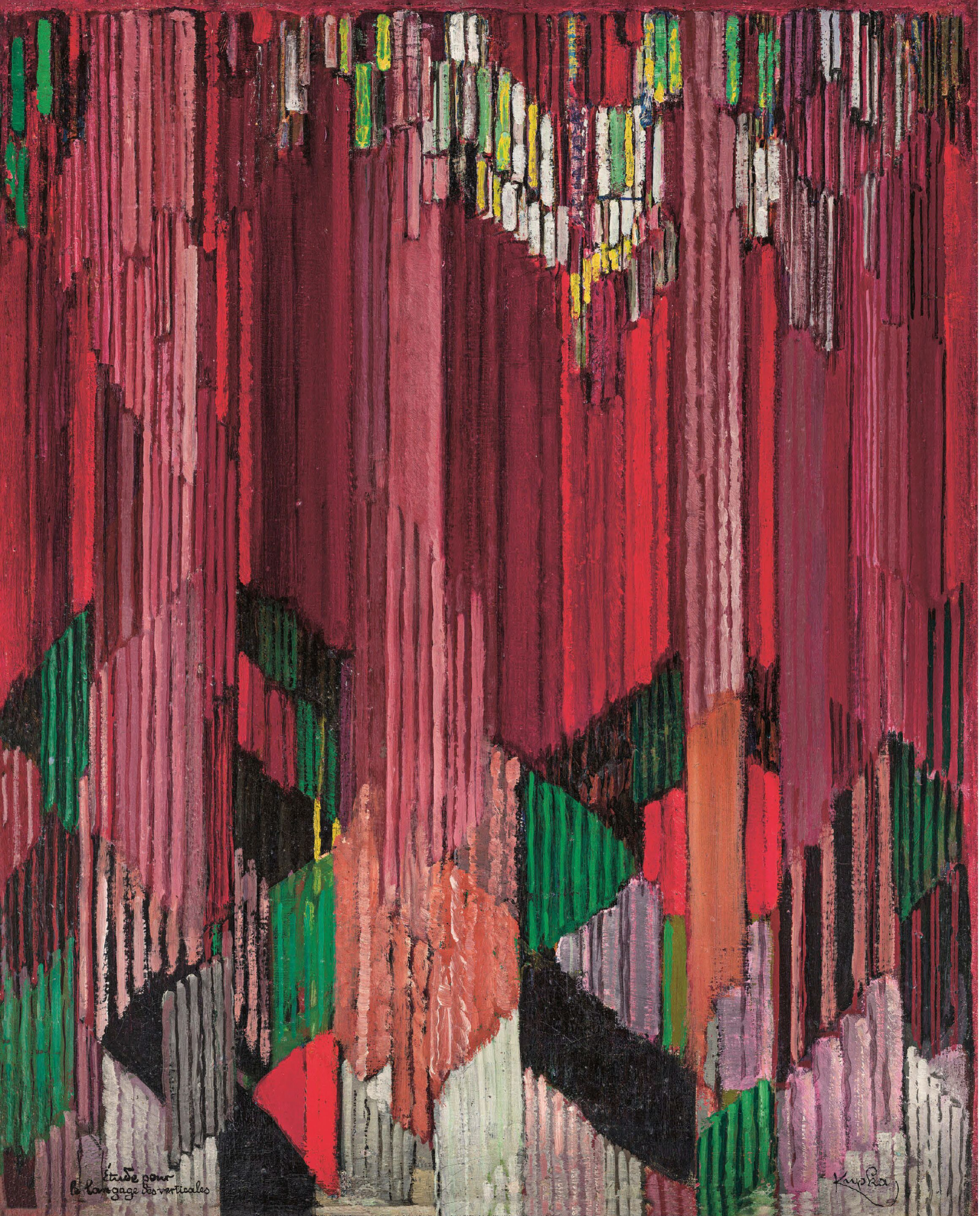
Slowly, almost imperceptibly, colors react to each other, delimit each other vertically, seek their order in the image. After 1910, Kupka spoke of his now firmly established credo with pride. Assuming that, contrary to the account in Genesis, the first days of the world must have been a feast of pure color, he expressed wanting to "make the mechanisms of Creation visible." And by erasing every trace of body or object, he could let "that other reality shine through in which the drawn line exists without justification by some objective form." Letting something shine through is like letting it happen.







VERTICAL AND DIAGONAL PLANES, 1913–23, oil on canvas, 138 × 85 cm
Left: UPWARD THRUST II, 1923, oil on canvas, 121 × 83 cm


Étude pour
le langage des verticales
Kupka

That is, it requires patience. And above all, it requires a renunciation of violence. This is how Kupka's strategy for abstraction differs from those of Wassily Kandinsky or Kazimir Malevich. Both of them scrapped all their figurative early work in their energetic efforts at abstraction, only to end up with the *very last* painting after which no further one would be possible. Kupka, however, never reached such an end point, could always imagine an entirely new image, wanted to, in fact, again and again. He stretched narrow beams of pigment through his images like parallel threads. Layered colored shapes like stelae. Rounded tones, proliferated curves, painting pictures that sparkle like crystals. Watched as hues and forms simultaneously merged into floral structures or towered into stony walls.

Kupka watched as hues and forms simultaneously merged into floral structures or towered into stony walls

STUDY FOR THE LANGUAGE OF VERTICALS, 1911, oil on canvas, 78 × 63 cm

And if many of the paintings he created just before World War I are reminiscent of the wild rock formations on Brittany's coast, that is by no means an inadmissible objectification, at least within Kupka's version of abstraction. This is precisely what makes his work so singular: the image never really needed to overcome the act of depiction, which remains a bold option, so the picture did not have to replace or even shed anything. These works that want only to consist of colors, shapes, and rhythms never lost their connection to the real world, their analogy to the sensually perceptible. And if those colors, shapes, and rhythms give the impression of a glowing church window, then the picture can also just be called *The Cathedral* (1912–13).

Looking back, Kupka described his path to abstraction as a *musical* experience. A painter's composition of colors, forms, and rhythms, he recalled in his autobiography from the 1920s, is like composing a fugue, "where the sounds evolve like veritable physical entities, intertwine, come and go." The same year that Kupka painted his famous *Amphora, Fugue in Two Colors* (1912), it showed in Paris beside Henri Matisse's *Nasturtiums with the Painting "Dance" I* (1912), Francis Picabia's *Procession* (1912), as well as a series of cubist works by Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger. Kupka's was the first purely abstract painting, and the critics were somewhat perplexed: "The elegant chromatic arabesques based on feminine lines by Mr. Kupka are games which are not within everyone's reach. Even with the greatest sympathy for the cubist effort, one cannot yet admire these works."

Indeed, that admiration came later. In Alfred Barr's epochal exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1936, Kupka was fêted as a pioneer of non-representational art. He was the artist we had to thank for "the first geometrical curvilinear and the first rectilinear pure-abstractions in modern art." The fact that his abstraction, unlike Kandinsky's, did not require a deliberate renunciation of the world or representation per se, but instead concentrated fully on the musical use of forms and colors, has gone unrecognized for a long time. In the painter's view, there was a systematic order to shapes and colors, just like there is one for notes in music. Thus, for example, he was convinced that round is the ideal shape for red, while orange prefers ovals, and green favors wavier shapes. And, he confidently declaimed, "Blue, like its closest neighbors on the spectrum, because it seems to recede in space, or at least draw back into itself, should be motivated or enclosed by tapered, rectilinear forms."

Admittedly, this makes abstraction sound a bit complicated and awfully, well, abstract. So it might have been inevitable that Kupka's late work would become distrustful of any organic blooming of pictorial elements and instead put on strict geometric shackles. But the fact that the painter never completely abandoned the world around him is illustrated by his clear passion for machine engineering, which culminated in paintings such as *Drinking Steel* (*L'Acier Boit*, 1927–30), a visual metaphor that uses cogs and gears to somewhat naively celebrate the industrial era's triumphs.

Geometric discipline may have seized the last phase of Kupka's career, as he adopted a method consisting of rules and compliant variations thereof, but one would have to be as blind as his early critics if one did not also see the surprise, the playful arrogance that the artist still marshalled. This was the very freedom he had grasped by dedicating himself to the mystery of colors and their arcane affinity for certain shapes, and it would prove his most enduring accomplishment.

Yet perhaps the real miracle was precisely the fact that his dissolution of the world of bodies and things, his blossoming of pure colorful sensuality, all came off without a struggle, without any of the imperious acts of will with which other painters from Kupka's generation felt they needed to conquer abstraction. Quietly, but triumphantly, he let his paintings become larger, more monumental, more and more grandiose—and, beguiled by the magic of his focused flows of color, suddenly no one felt the need to ask what the residual geometric shapes that still showed up here and there *meant*.

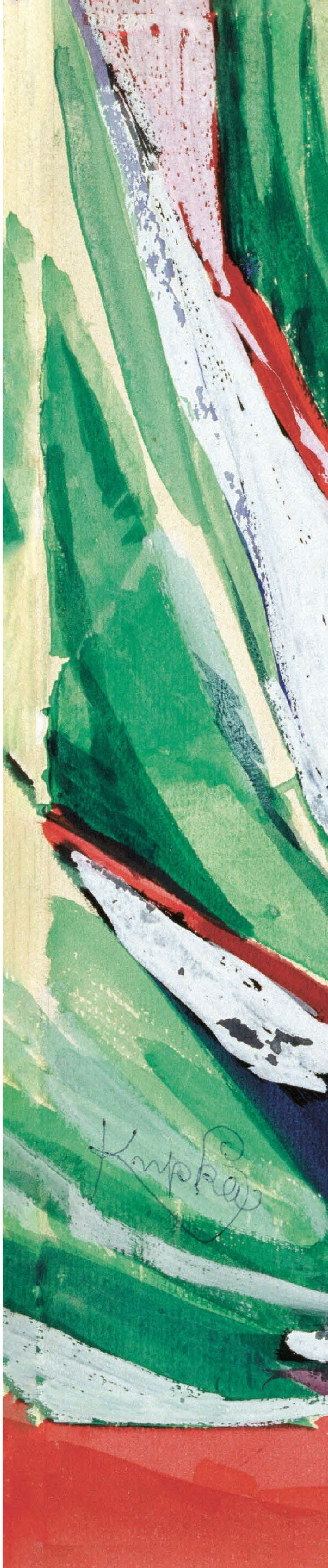
Some compositions from the early 1920s he simply called *Creation*—that says it all. The victory of un-representational visibility has never been described more simply, less pretentiously. If the history of abstraction is one of the most energetic chapters in European art history, then Kupka's contribution is one of the few whose power is just as compelling today.

Still, not everyone understood these paintings' secretive, silent beauty. Kupka himself grew obscure when he tried to describe his work. *Création dans les Arts Plastiques* was published in 1923—a tough read, one that leads far away from the immediate, immersive experience that his paintings offer, circling once again around the old myths and spiritualisms to which he had always remained susceptible. The critical response was correspondingly modest. Quite unlike Kandinsky, who, a decade earlier, had made abstraction speak, as it were, with his radical treatise *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*.

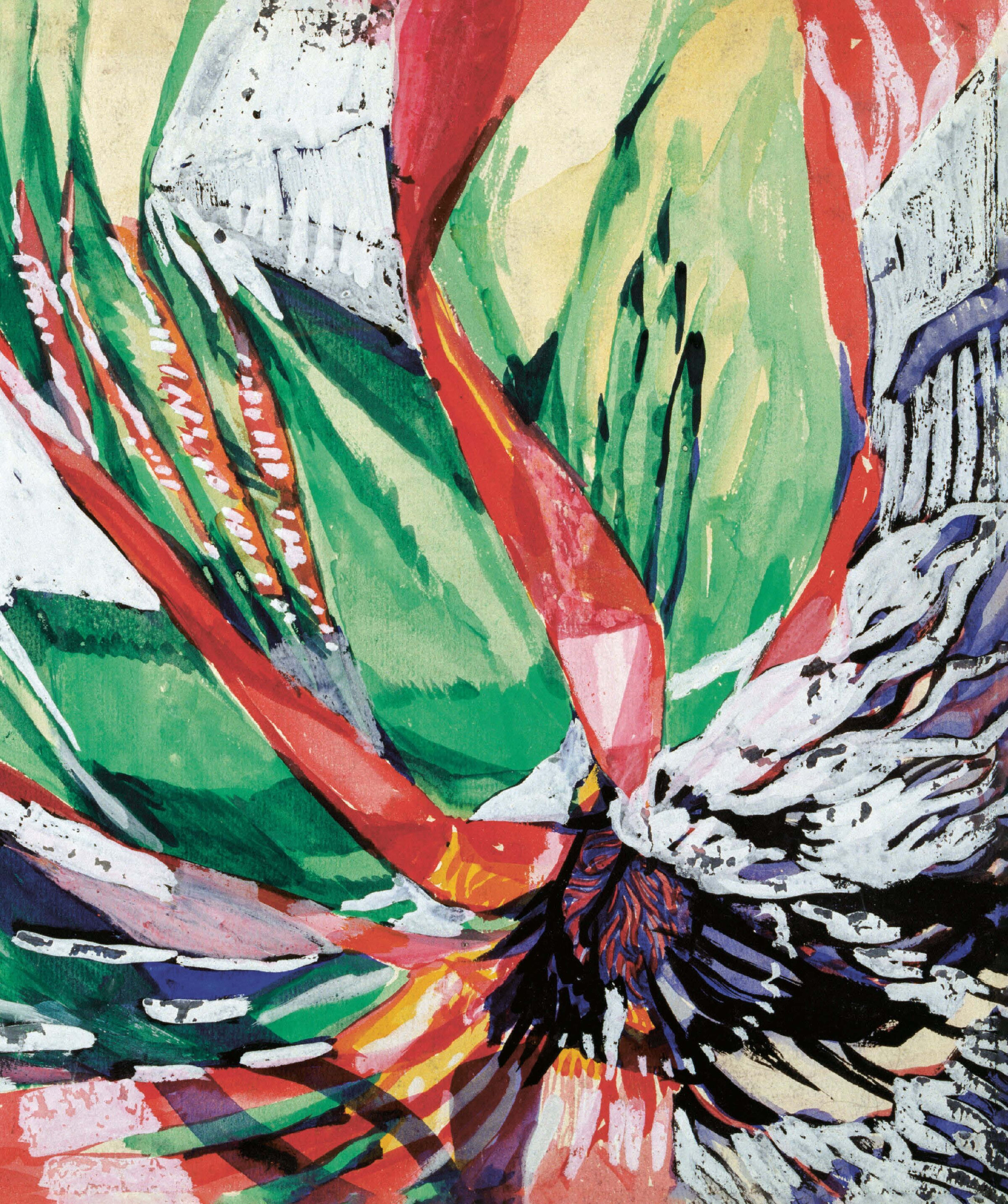
Perhaps that's the most radiant proof of his work's sovereignty, that it has no champions, no successors

Ludmila Vachtová, the Czech art historian who worked as a critic in Switzerland after her emigration in the early 1970s, always spoke of František Kupka with glowing eyes. She wrote her doctoral thesis about him and was particularly close to the artist. The fact that he belonged to the generation of pioneers who, like the biblical patriarchs, kept watch over the art of abstract painting seemed to her to be one of the few art-historical judgments that would withstand any court of appeal. But she also had to admit that her hero remained strangely undiscovered, that Kupka would probably always have connoisseurs and devotees, but no actual audience that would associate the name with a clear overview of his work. And yet, perhaps that's the most radiant proof of his work's sovereignty, that it has no champions, no successors, that every generation gets to rediscover it for themselves.

For apostle Diefenbach, this all happened too late. He never got to see his disciple Kupka reach his career zenith. He had already passed away on Capri in 1913. The same year his former student painted his most beautiful, freest pictures. Had he gotten to see them, who knows, he might have wanted nothing more than to re-ascend the Hohe Peissenberg, to await a glorious new dawning.



FLORAL, 1919, gouache and watercolor on paper, 31 × 32 cm



Maidens' Voyage

Photography
JULIE GREVE

Styling
MARIE CHAIX

Opening spread left:
Dress EMA URŠIČ
Top VINTAGE

Opening spread right:
Dress EMA URŠIČ
Top VINTAGE
Gloves STYLIST'S OWN

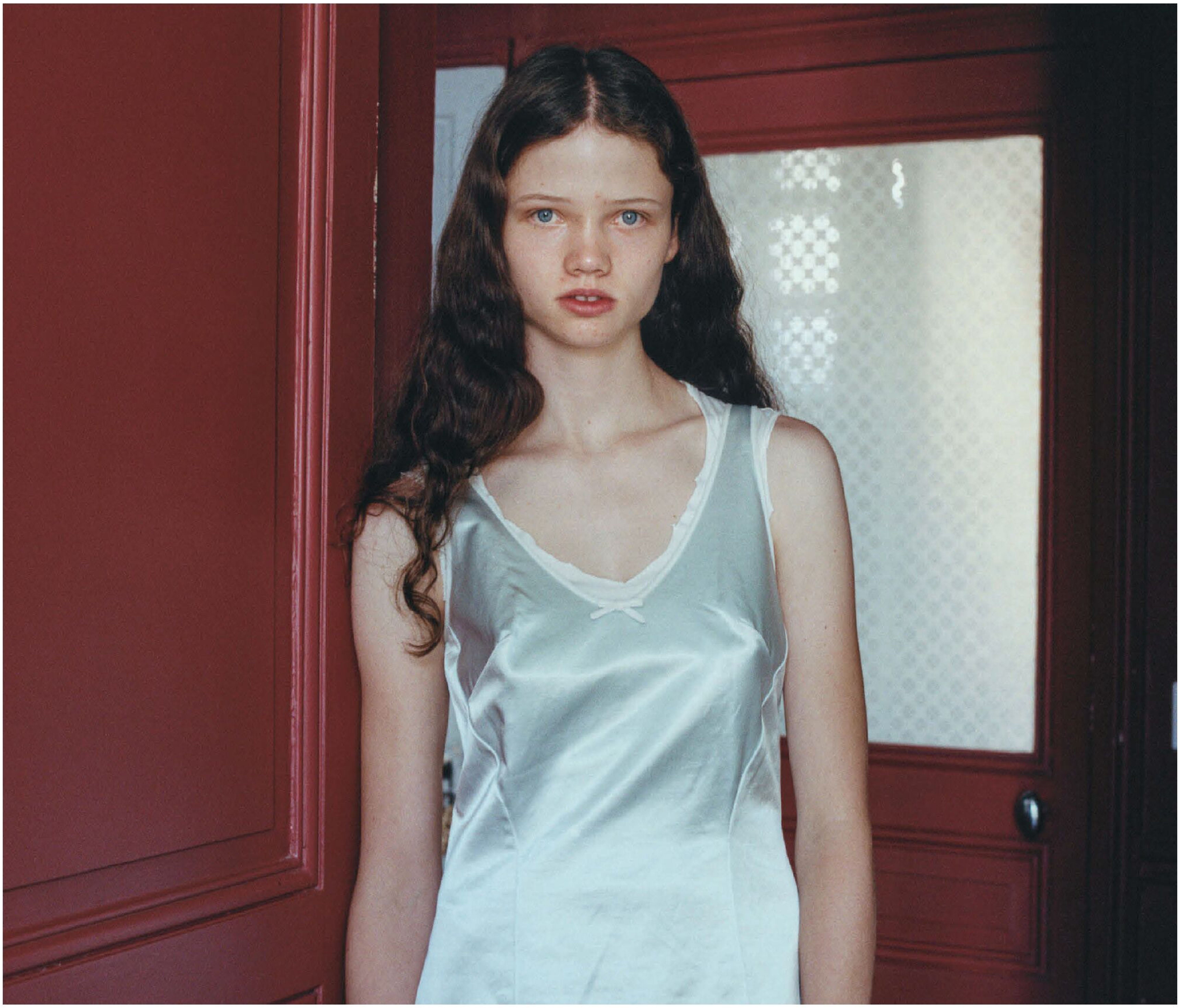
Left page:
Dress LOU DE BÈTOLY
Top VINTAGE
Gloves STYLIST'S OWN

Right page:
Dress LOU DE BÈTOLY
Sunglasses VINTAGE
Veil LA COMPAGNIE DU COSTUME

Dress
JACQUEMUS

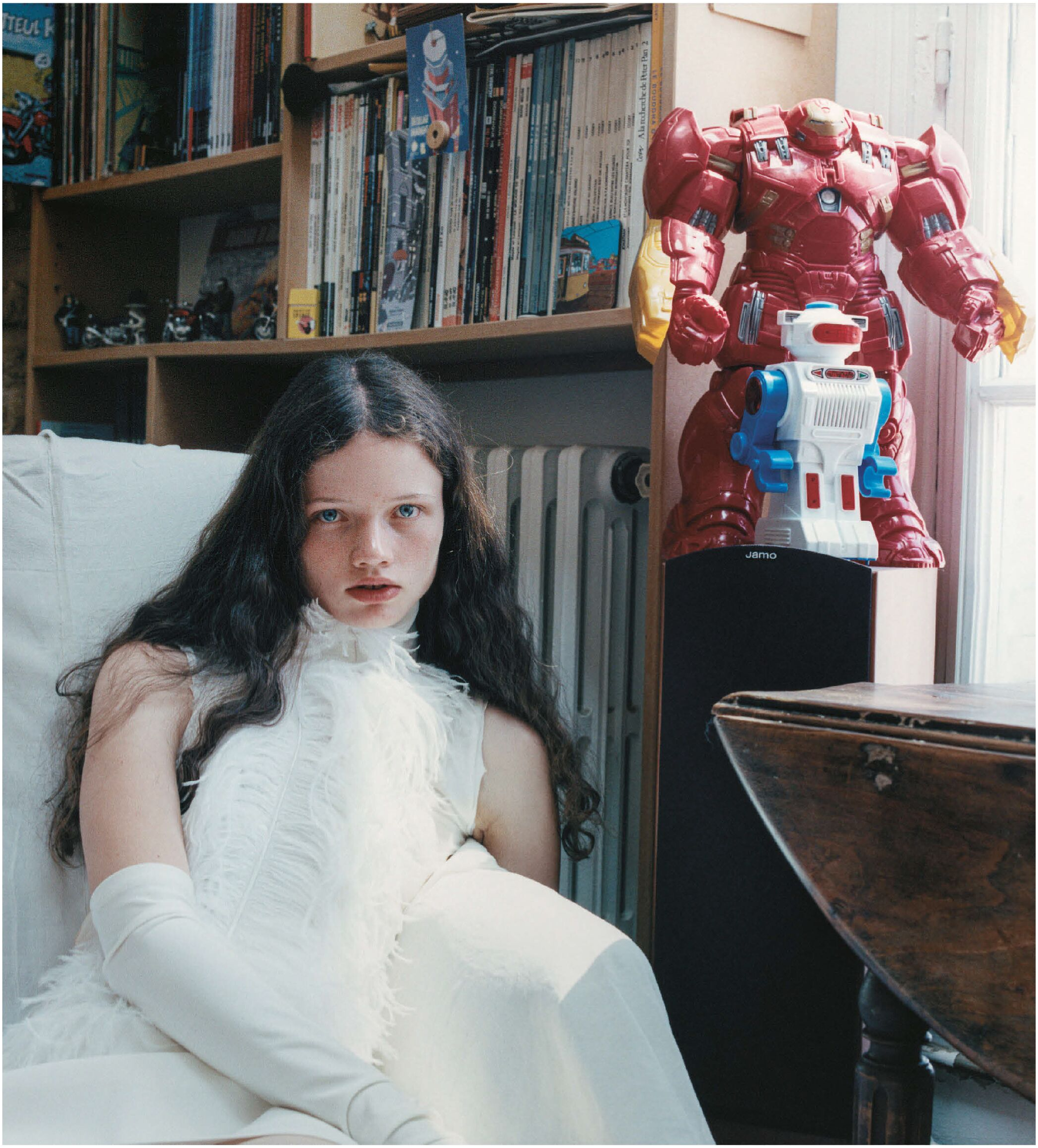
Sunglasses
BALENCIAGA

Veil, bouquet
LA COMPAGNIE DU COSTUME

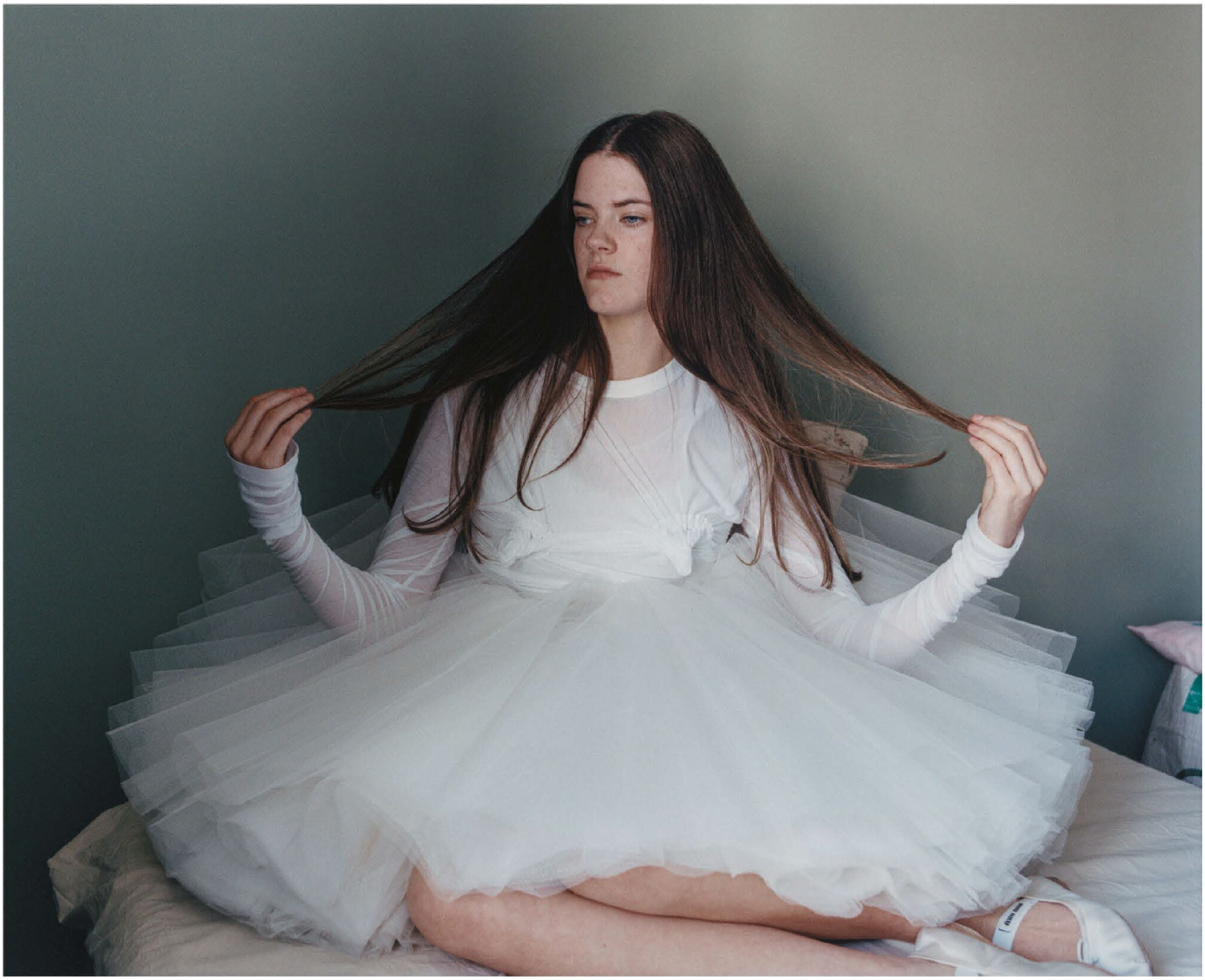


Left page:
Dress MIU MIU
Top VINTAGE

Right page:
Coat BALENCIAGA
Gloves STYLIST'S OWN



Bodysuit, skirt COURRÈGES
Top VINTAGE
Gloves STYLIST'S OWN



Top VAQUERA
Dress GIVENCHY
Shoes MIU MIU

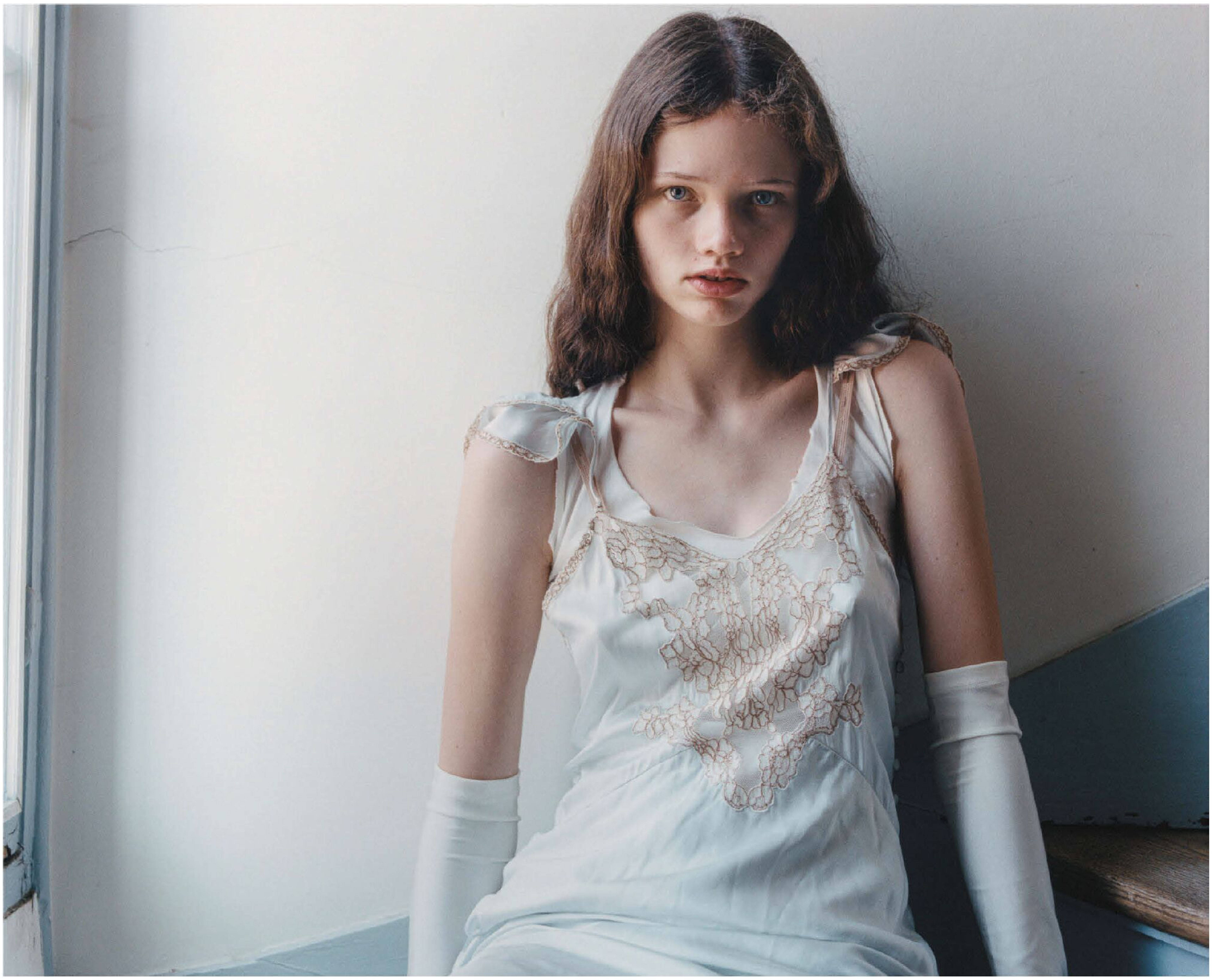
Left:
Top
VAQUERA

Tank
VINTAGE

Gloves
STYLIST'S
OWN

Right:
Top
VAQUERA

Tank
VINTAGE



Left page:
Dress CHLOÉ
Top VINTAGE
Gloves STYLIST'S OWN

Right page:
Dress LA COMPAGNIE DU COSTUME
Sunglasses BALENCIAGA
Top VINTAGE

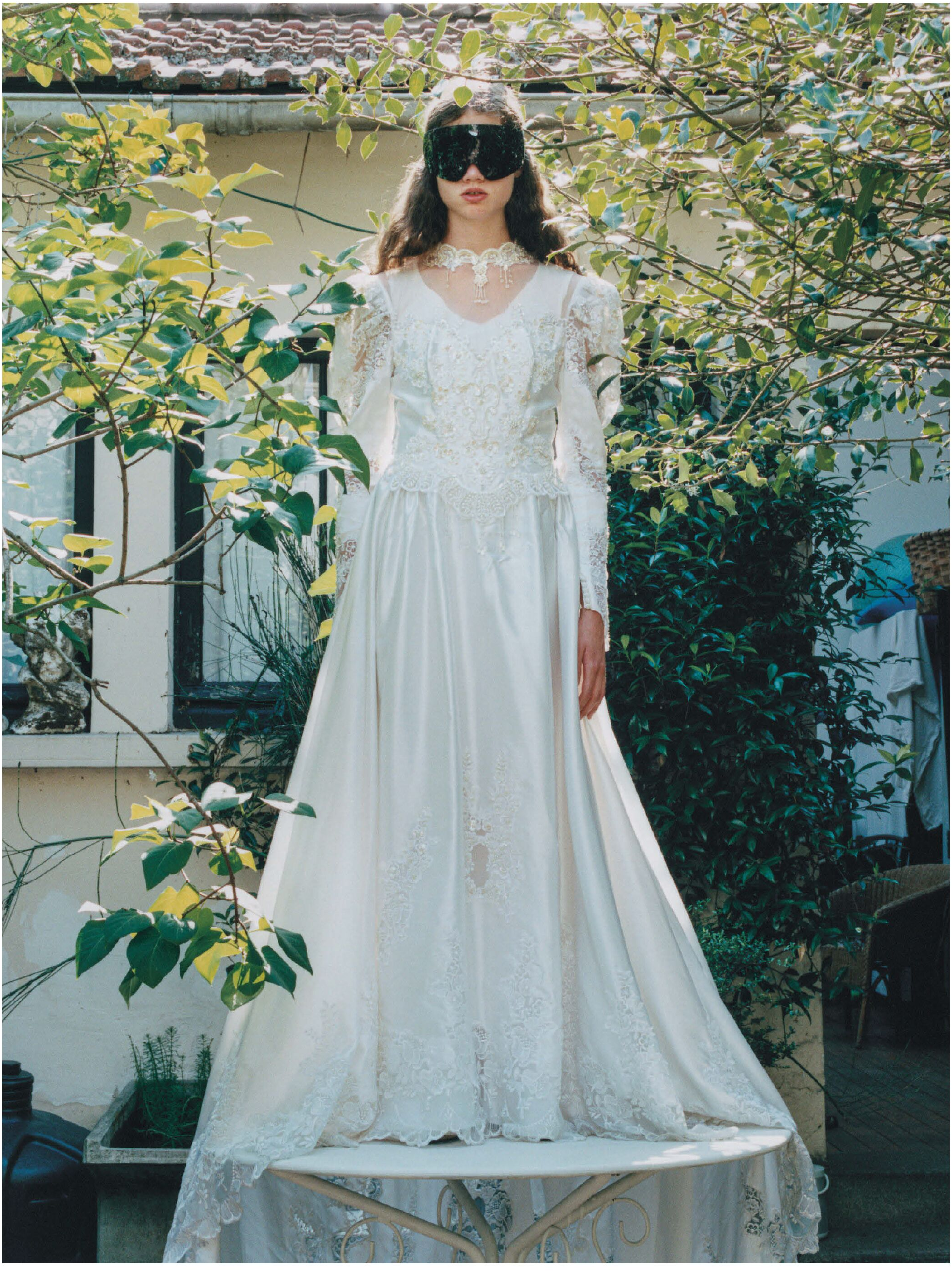
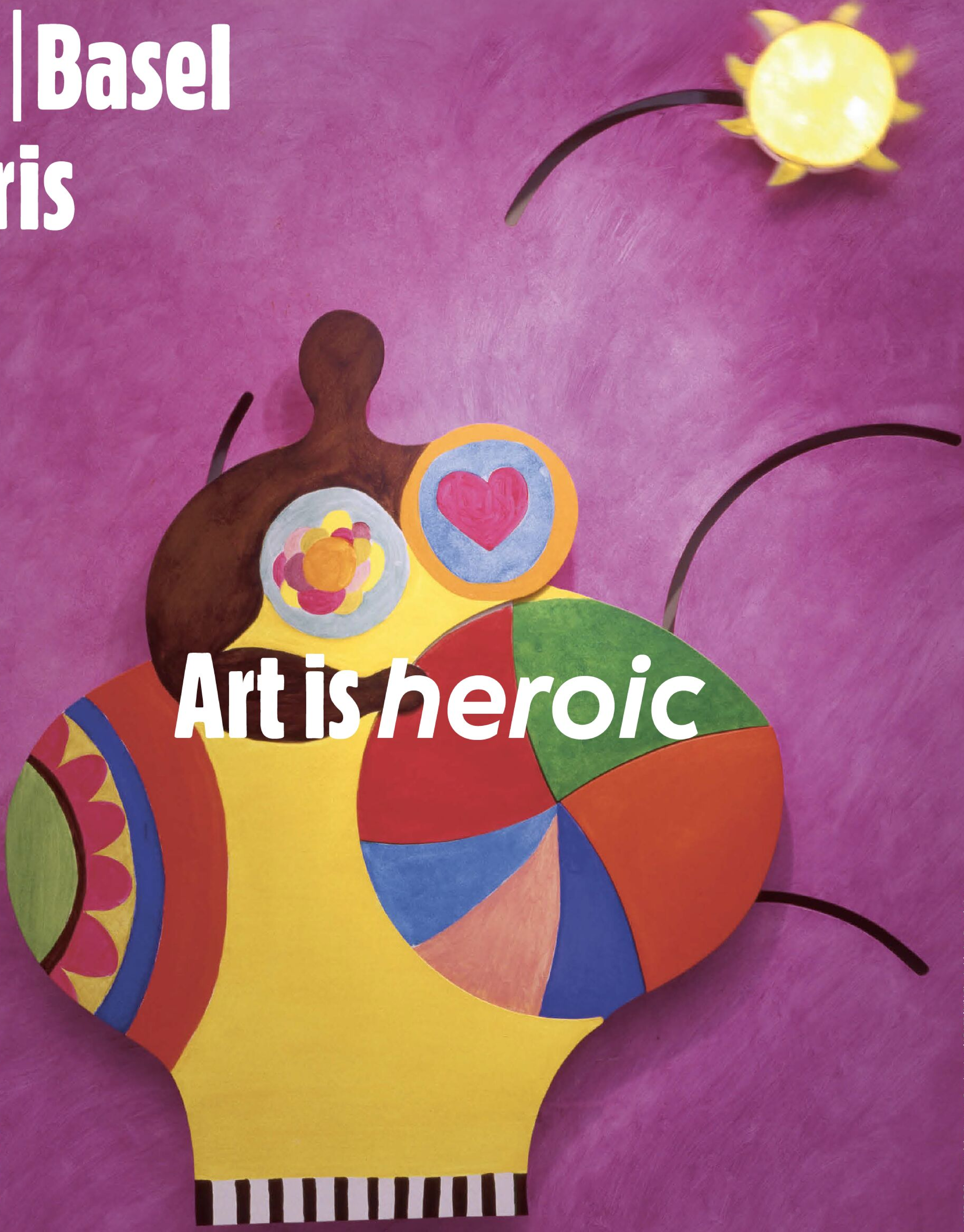


Photo assistant FRANÇOIS BRIENS, styling assistant ARNAUD BUISSON, models SARAH HANFGARN, IONA MCCAUSLAND, ROSE MCCAUSLAND
Casting director JULIA LANGE, producer JOCELYN RUMMLER, production coordinator SALOMEE MAULIEN, production assistant HADRIEN BONNAT

Art | Basel
Paris



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Niki de Saint Phalle, *La Déesse noire*, 1993. © Photograph by Laurent Condominas / ADAGP / Niki Charitable Art Foundation.
Courtesy of Galerie Georges-Philippe & Nathalie Vallois.

ENCORE

INTERNATIONAL

> “I am one of the last artists who still maintains real friendships with other artists”
> — Markus Lüpertz, see page 196

“The academy must be a place where art and being an artist are celebrated, *lived*”

MARKUS LÜPERTZ
in conversation with NILS EMMERICHS *and*
CORNELIUS TITTEL

For a good quarter of a century, MARKUS LÜPERTZ headed the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, turning it into Europe’s most impactful art school. Having hired the likes of Doig, Oehlen, and Trockel, he stared down meddlesome politicians and quashed the occasional student uprising. Here, he discusses how Raphael’s *School of Athens* inspired his vision as a rector, the long shadow of Beuys, the demise of the Chicken Department—and why the ideal academy should never offer more than one photography class

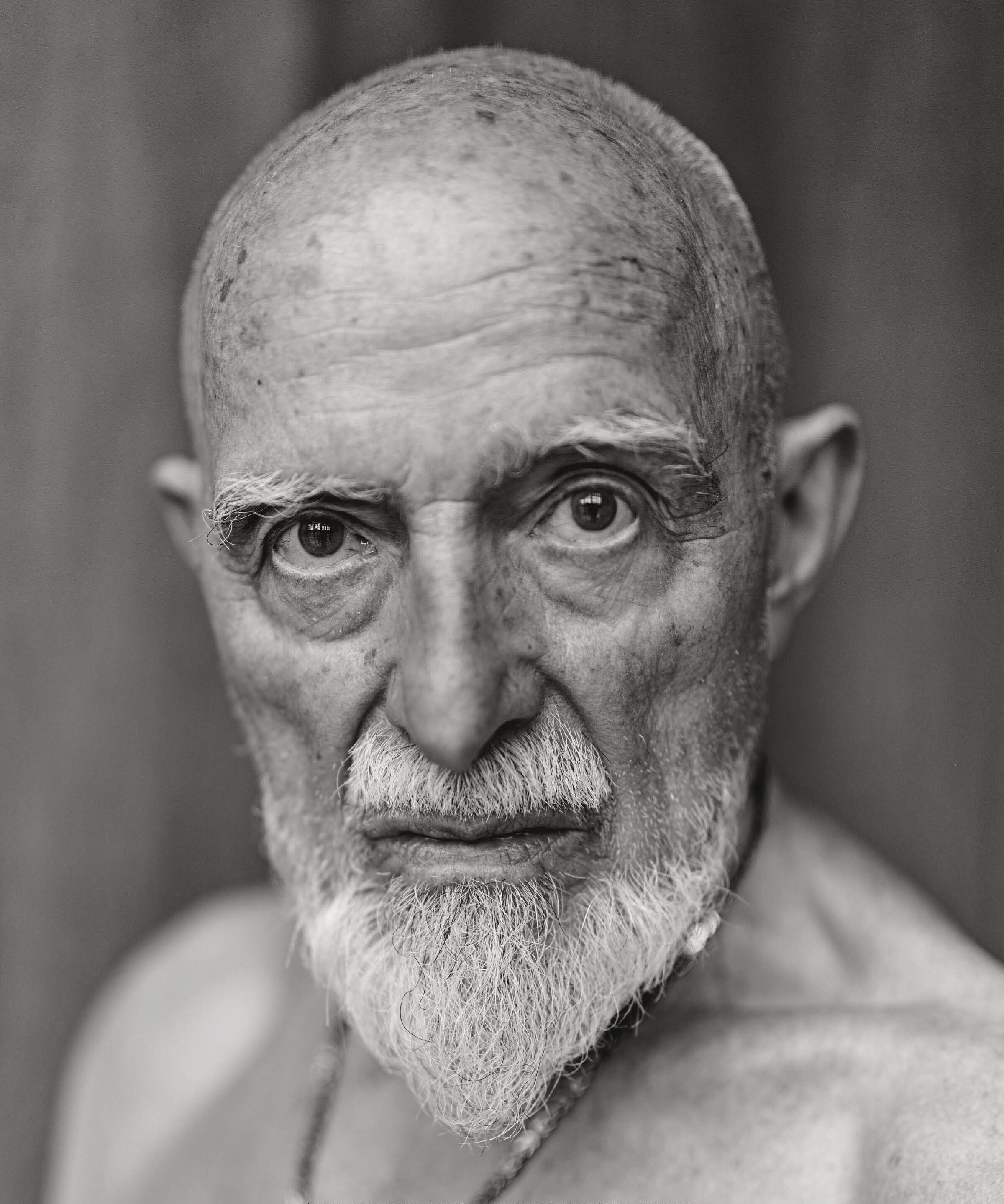
BLAU INTERNATIONAL: Mr. Lüpertz, you are one of the best-known contemporary German painters. But we’d like to discuss a chapter in your career that has been rather underexamined. In 1988, you were appointed rector of the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, which might be Germany’s most important art school. Perhaps no one has shaped it as much as you, because you understood it as a model for art’s politics at large.

— MARKUS LÜPERTZ: I was rector for 25 years, though I actually worked there for 26—one year as a professor, after which I was quickly appointed rector. That is an extraordinarily long time. Since World War II, no one else has held this office as long.

What attracted you to the position?

— I had a clear idea of what the institution represented. I was inspired by Raphael’s wonderful *Stanza della Segnatura* frescoes at the Vatican, particularly the *School of Athens* (1508–11). That was my inspiration. I pursued an art academy with a philosophical backstairs, if you will—an ideal derived from humanity’s historical consciousness. Later, I was often accused of having established an academy purely for painting and sculpture, and of having given photography too little space. But the reality was different. Bernd and Hilla Becher, whom I appreciated very much and who held the photography professorship during my tenure, kept saying to me, “Markus, let’s please have one photography professorship, no more.” They appreciated and cherished this exclusivity. We shared an admiration for August Sander and black-and-white photography. The fact that we could talk and think about such things made it a kind of workshop. At the beginning of my term in office, I reintroduced nude

MARKUS LÜPERTZ photographed by THOMAS HAUSER for BLAU International



KOD'AK EPP 6005
53
EPP ▶11
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drawing and working with classic painting materials. And I created a professorship in poetry, the only one of its kind in the country. At first Oswald Wiener held it, later Durs Grünbein.

Paul Gauguin advised that young painters "have a model, but let them draw the curtain over it while they are painting"—not to copy nature, but to dream of it in pursuit of the absolute. Were such stories part of your ideas about art education?

— That anecdote is fantastic. It encompasses the relationship of painters to the world in all its depth, and it certainly shaped my conception of the art academy. Until the 19th century, the Vienna academy had regulations that went so far as requiring that, before painting even a single leaf, you first had to make a paper model and get it signed off. Students were not allowed to directly draw from life. This academism gave rise to a pure artificiality. And that is still very relevant today. Such thoughts preoccupied me.

For me, the academy should be a place where artists debate art. That was the idea I derived from Raphael's *School of Athens*. These great artists who came together inspired others, who then perhaps had some clearer perspective, who could explain something differently, or had distinctive theories. Anything was possible. As teachers, we were amateurs. That was the joke: we were masters of our craft, and the students were a secondary matter. They should be grateful to have come to a Mount Olympus where artists were inspired and entertained. They benefited from this. I've never liked the word "students," by the way. For me, they were always apprentices, because I am a master, and a master has apprentices.

When I imagine you back then, you're surrounded by some of the period's greatest artists. But at the same time, I don't know many of your students who later became successful or famous. How do you explain that?

— That may be true in my case, but our academy did produce great people.

Was it your pronounced self-confidence, the fact that you valued yourself, that enabled you to even hire and work alongside all these really great artists?

— I had the necessary self-confidence to appoint only excellent, important artists. I never hired below my level. I was too proud for that. During my time as rector in Düsseldorf, I also never kept any artist away for fear of competition. I was convinced that the greater the artist, the more remarkable their character, the greater that made *me* too. This level of self-confidence—if you don't have it, if you instead link your personal career politicking to the academy, that's deadly. You can only succeed if you surround yourself with excellent colleagues. I am also one of the last artists who still maintains real friendships with other artists. Unfortunately, many of them have recently passed away.

Does this mean that it requires a certain self-assurance and resilience to run an institution and at the same time hold one's own against other great artists? Or, to put it more pointedly: was it about keeping an artistic madhouse together, and uniting it under a common purpose?

— Of course, that's key. You have to look the hurricane in the eye. Art is controlled madness and therefore only really meant for a select few. I favored painting and sculpture, and I strictly adhered to the Bechers' wish that one photography class would suffice, which the two of them were right about. Their so-called Düsseldorf School of Photography—with such important photographers as Andreas Gursky, whose work I appreciate very much, as well as Thomas Ruff, Thomas Struth, Candida Höfer, and Tata Ronkholz—clearly confirmed that their instincts were correct.

> "I never kept any artist away for fear of competition. I was convinced that the greater the artist I appointed, the more remarkable their character, the greater that made *me* too"

Left: Markus Lüpertz in front of the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, 2009

Hallway of the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf

So the hiring process was never about whether someone had, or was thought to have, special pedagogical skills?

— No, that was never a criterion for me. If they had those skills, all the better, but if not, that wasn't a problem either. Fritz Schwegler was a wonderful educator in the best sense. His students were Thomas Demand, Katharina Fritsch, Charline von Heyl, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Martin Honert, and Thomas Schütte, to name but a few. Schwegler understood art and didn't shy away from what it could achieve. The same was true for Konrad Klapheck. They were outstanding professors, and coincidentally Schwegler, Klapheck, and my friend Georg Baselitz were all sons of teachers and educators. All similarly afflicted, they possessed, and still possess, great knowledge and the ability to impart it. I've learned a lot from them. Any success I had at the academy was because people came there for me—and the artists came because I had made it a place for conversations about art.

Joseph Beuys died two years before your appointment as rector. Gerhard Richter stayed until 1993. How did you deal with this generational change?

— At the start of this transition, I appointed artists whom I still greatly appreciate today, including two outstanding ones: Rosemarie Trockel and Katharina Fritsch. With Albert Oehlen and Peter Doig, I hired two of the most important and influential painters of their generation. Siegfried Anzinger, who understood better than almost anyone else what painting and drawing can do, also joined us, as did Jannis Kounellis, who has left a lasting impression on how sculpture is understood. A widespread problem today is that many professors are barely present at the academy. This behavior shows a lack of appreciation for the

> “I’ve never liked the word ‘students,’ by the way. For me, they were always apprentices, because I am a master, and a master has apprentices”

institution. I think the idea that “the less you’re there, the bigger an artist you are” is utter nonsense. Such attitudes make it clear that the essence of the institution has not been understood. It’s not about earning life appointments and complying with institutional rules, but about a deeper, idealistic identification with the *idea* of the academy.

That also means you have to want to join its ranks.

— This goes both ways. I remember one person whose name I don’t want to mention. Their appointment was to be made with a majority of only one vote. I immediately explained that we couldn’t hire them—if almost half of the votes were against them, it would be unfair to bring this person into the academy. I advertised the position again. Such decisions were essential for me in preserving the idea of commonality within the academy.

Another project that seemed obvious to me was establishing an academy gallery. Since the state did not provide any financial resources, I secured the support of the mayor of Düsseldorf, Joachim Erwin, a close friend of mine. Only professors were allowed to exhibit in this gallery. The chairman of Düsseldorf’s art dealers railed against this in the press at the time, incorrectly assuming that it was a commercial proposition, whereas in London, such a concept had long been a matter of course. After I left, the project was unfortunately discontinued. I consider this my personal failure, because I failed to anchor the scheme more permanently. That still hurts. I was convinced that it was the right path.

Was it the appeal of the academy that brought a painter like Peter Doig to Düsseldorf?

— Of course. They all came because they shared my idea of the art academy. Jeff Wall, whom I appointed to succeed the Bechers, also came to Düsseldorf. Jeff is a great person and a consummate artist. Unfortunately, he did not stay long. One incident was decisive. A Swiss student desperately wanted to be accepted into his class. When Jeff turned him down, the student drove home, got a gun, and apparently returned with the intention of shooting Jeff. Sensing what was about to happen, Jeff reacted swiftly, like a photographer, and ran to safety. Afterwards, he came to me and said, “Markus, I expect things like that to happen in the US, but I really don’t need it in Germany.” Shortly after, he left. That was a bitter defeat.

The academy was full of such stories. One of the most beautiful—although it occurred before my term as rector—concerns the wonderful Canadian sculptor David Rabinowitch. In those years, he was rarely on site. One night, his students bricked up the entrance to his class, plastered the wall, and even joined up the skirting board. When Rabinowitch arrived from New York the following morning, he couldn’t find his classroom. For me, this was one of the best installations ever created at the academy.

Did you ever appoint an artist whom you were aware might be eccentric but who was artistically so outstanding that their professorship was incontestable?

— A.R. Penck, clearly. He proved to be an excellent professor. I consider him one of the most important painters after 1945. His profile made him an invaluable asset. The public has often condemned Penck—and still does to this day—whether for his external appearance or his extreme behavior. But anyone who came to the academy to be an artist knew he had something to teach them. There are many people who can speak wisely about life or about art, but few are able to reflect on themselves, on the deeply subjective decision to be an artist. The academy must be a place where art and being an artist are celebrated, *lived*.

How were you able to reconcile your own artistic work with the role of rector?

— As rector, I did not paint a single picture less. On Mondays, I came to the academy and took care of the bureaucracy. I was very fortunate to work alongside two outstanding collaborators: Peter Luhn, an accomplished lawyer who served as chancellor, and Walter Jürgen Hofmann, vice-rector and art historian. The three of us worked in one office. I would lie on the couch and explain what needed to be done. I often dictated my letters threefold. We had a fixed system for correspondence, because I was primarily concerned with conveying ideas. This part of the working day usually lasted until noon. After that, I made administrative decisions before I went out to lunch with the professors present that day. Then I held my classes, and in the evenings I played football. With all that done, I went to my studio to paint. It is nonsense to make demands on others as a rector and not work as an artist yourself. I could never stand it when

Markus Lüpertz and students, c. 1980

artists at some point became only professors and neglected their own work. For me, as for many of my colleagues at the time, this was purely a question of organization. Because I am neither an educator nor chief administrator, but an artist.

Albert Oehlen mentioned your generosity toward the students and the great freedom you gave them. There's said to have been a party in Oehlen's class that got completely out of hand. The entire classroom was destroyed, and two students urinated on the resulting

“It is nonsense to make demands on others as a rector and not work as an artist yourself. I could never stand it when artists at some point became only professors and neglected their own work”

rubbish pile. Oehlen wanted to kick them out. But you just told him, "Nonsense, that's not necessary."

— I gave them a good telling-off, but that was enough. There were always incidents like that, especially at the beginning of my term. It was a turbulent time. After Joseph Beuys and all the scandals and political activism, the students suddenly felt they had to behave like university students. But art students aren't like university students. This has to do with respect for the institution.

There were repeated conflicts with the students' union, which always opposed hierarchies. They demanded freedoms that they de facto had long already had. They could basically do whatever they wanted. But then the students' union founded a so-called Chicken Department, built a chicken coop on the grounds, and actually kept chickens there. Anyone who took care of them officially received a students' union position, was allowed to study for two more semesters, and correspondingly received financial assistance for longer. The whole thing was declared an art project. I tolerated it but closely watched how the animals were treated. At some point, a chicken starved to death because they forgot to feed it. At that moment, it became clear that these students were by no means as radical as they considered themselves to be. They were basically bourgeois at heart. On weekends, they'd regularly drive home to their parents, and they argued among themselves about who should take care of the chickens over the holidays. So there were further mishaps, and again animals died. As a result, I banned the Chicken Department, prompting massive protest. I just replied: "I will not have chickens murdered on my watch. I am strictly against it."

And that ended things?

— Later, the students' union members refused to leave their offices, although they urgently needed to be renovated. I offered them a free studio, which they refused. They really wanted a large painting studio, and that was out of the question for me. So I asked them: "What are you? Artists or bureaucrats?" They then occupied the studio they had their eye on. Fortunately, it was winter, and I had the caretaker turn off their heating and phone line. They called that unlawful. But just as it was with the chickens, they drove home to their parents on the weekend. I had the locks changed in their absence, and when they returned, they demonstratively blocked the hallway and claimed that the caretaker had stolen money from a display case—a pure invention. Next, they stole a key from the caretaker, and after I immediately demanded its return, the situation quickly came to a head. I took one of the students' union leaders aside and said: "This is an art academy. Give me back the key and move into your old administration rooms in the basement next to the cafeteria. I won't call the police, that's out of the question for me. I'll take care of it myself. But be fair. Come at me one at a time." From that day on, there were no more chicken deaths or studio occupations.

> "That was the joke: we were masters of our craft, and the students were a secondary matter. They should be grateful to have come to a Mount Olympus where artists were inspired and entertained"

RAPHAEL, *The School of Athens*, 1508–11

As early as 1792, Francisco de Goya adopted a forward-looking attitude in his criticism of the academy, combining the traditional idea of *artes liberales* with the modern idea of individual freedom. A court painter who later opposed the royal house, he became a prophet of modernism. In your new poetry collection, *The Right to Immorality in the Visual Arts, or A Path to Poetry*, you argue that art must defend itself without submitting to doctrines, in the spirit of Friedrich Schlegel. Why do you think there are always attempts to control art?

— This is a very interesting point, because it touches on a conflict that is hardly known to the public and is closely linked to the history of the academy. The fact that you cite Goya and Schlegel is remarkable in that these liberal pioneers were also reference points for Joseph Beuys. Beuys was undoubtedly an important and highly charismatic professor. He had a magnetism the likes of which I never experienced again. One was inclined to believe anything he said. He set the course for everything that came after 1945. So he became a professor, and usually two years later you'd then become a civil servant for life. In his case, however, this was prevented. The conflict over his motto, "Everyone is an artist," and his wanting to enroll hundreds of students—which would eventually lead to his dismissal and his clash with future German president Johannes Rau—both had a clear political and academic background. Yet, the state government in Düsseldorf decided to refuse Beuys tenure for a specific reason: his depression, resulting from his wartime experiences, for which he had at first sought psychiatric treatment. When that didn't help, he'd gone to stay at the farm of his early patrons, the Van der Grinten brothers, who took great care of him. When Beuys learned that it was his psychological issues that had cost him his tenure, he reacted radically: he wanted to destroy the academy—both as an artistic performance and as an act of resistance against a repressive system. And so he admitted anyone who showed up to his class. Soon there were over 300 people. He transformed the process of his official rejection directly into art's liberatory, uncontrollable energy. He was not concerned with his tenure as such, but with political and state control. Unfortunately, all of this happened before my time. Under my tenure, such a thing would never have happened. I'll give you that in writing!

Because he would have just gotten tenure as a professor?

— Definitely. Joseph was fine, but he was struggling with depression, which was caused by skull injuries after his plane crashed in the war. He needed treatment and the support of the wonderful Van der Grintens, who cared for him intensively.

You mean you would have ignored or overcome the government's concerns about Beuys's appointment?

— During my tenure, there was frequently talk of a "Lex Lüpertz" because I always opposed state intervention. The academy was constantly faced with new requirements, such as the introduction of student evaluations. For me, however, those were out of the question: I didn't want students evaluating me or my colleagues. So I went to the ministry and asked where they'd even come up with such an absurd idea. Eventually, they admonished me, but I continued to fight back until they left us alone. I also prevented the implementation of the Bologna Process—absolutely preposterous. I made it clear that introducing the BA/MA system at our academy was simply not going to happen. An artist gets a master craftsman's certificate, and that's it. But it wasn't just the ministry; the students' union also turned against me and demanded a diploma. The ministry was happy to have found another party that shared their interests. They felt they had gained the advantage and argued that art students were entitled to said diploma. My first issue was with the term "diploma." Instead, I suggested something called an "academic letter."

“Beuys wanted to destroy the academy—both as an artistic performance and as an act of resistance against a repressive system”

Right: Joseph Beuys with students at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, winter semester, 1967–68

Markus Lüpertz in his office, 2004

In a bottom corner, small type would then read, “The equivalent of a diploma.” That’s how it was finally implemented. Then I introduced a very demanding exam. The students’ union came to me all worked up and complained that it was far too difficult. My response was: “How do you mean? You wanted a diploma, didn’t you? Now do you want it to be taken seriously or not? Then you’ll have to do something for it. If all you want is carte blanche from me, let’s call it an academic letter without a diploma.” It was clear to me: *I don’t need a diploma, I’m an artist*. Some students failed the examination, and I finally figured out why they wanted a diploma so badly. It turned out that it would allow them to register with the employment office as “graduated academics” and receive financial support. My idea was that if they wanted a diploma, they’d at least have to make the effort to earn one.

Did you understand it as your mission to expose Germany’s bizarre bureaucracy and state structures, especially in view of increasing attempts to “scientificize” art?

— Absolutely. It was sometimes hard to believe just how deeply these bureaucrats got tangled in their own Kafkaesque protocols. Some policy changes were just too absurd. At one point, the tenure appointment after two years of professorship was briefly abolished. The ministry summoned me to talk about it. When I asked why they had abolished it in the first place, there was an icy silence. Finally, some administrator said: “Just be happy about it. Because if you don’t like one of them, you can just kick them out!” I blew up: “We’re not probation offenders. We’re artists!”

Do you wish there was more resistance in academies and museums, in the art world in general? And above all, real substantive discussions instead of formulaic statements?

— These days, many museum directors are careerists and civil servants. They have impressive resumes, I acknowledge that. But once they reach a certain level of the hierarchy, they start avoiding any risk. There is a fatal orientation toward staying safe, and there’s hardly any room to learn from mistakes. Art should always engage with conflicts and deal with them productively. Otherwise, it loses its relevance. If you compare this with people like Wilhelm von Bode, who back in the late 19th century shaped the museum landscape like no other, it’s clear what is lacking today. Those individual efforts and singular achievements that we still rely on are increasingly forgotten. The same applies to Harry Graf Kessler. His contributions to art history are rarely appreciated. Today, many exhibitions and museum showcases seem interchangeable, curated by committee, all organized according to the same principles.

That's why I changed everything at the academy. I wanted to create a place where Raphael's painting could translate into a singular place, someplace that defies appropriation. Constantly tangling with the ministry and its administrative staff, who are awful sticklers for rules, not to mention pressure from the press—it all requires enormous fortitude. But if you focus exclusively on art and don't make concessions to public expectations, something unique can emerge. You just have to be incredibly resilient.

Harry Graf Kessler gave us the incisive idea that art is the most advanced form of thinking through images, and that painting is its most direct expression. Would you say that, now that the artisanal foundation of painting is no longer taught with the same rigor, this type of visual thought has been lost?

— That really is the case. Painting is a craft that only becomes art through the genius of the artist, but this notion is now completely foreign to most people. Painting was pushed out of the visual arts and stigmatized as old fashioned, irrelevant. But just think of the ancient Greek painter Apollodorus and his disciple Zeuxis. They laid the foundations for perspective and shadow thousands of years ago, and yet we're still learning from their discoveries. Much of this has been forgotten or now seems simply incomprehensible to the general public. There is nothing really "new" in painting; there are only new *artists*. Even Kandinsky didn't do anything revolutionary, formally speaking. It was still just brush, paint, and canvas, guided by his personal expression. For him, it was about a longing for abstraction, for liberation from the object. This development continued through monochromists such as Mark Rothko or Gotthard Graubner. Today we're at a point where a black surface is simply accepted as an "image" and sometimes even looks more representational than an apple—people sometimes even grasp black squares faster.

Since 2015, no living painter has been honored with a solo exhibition at the Tate Modern, the most successful European museum in recent decades.

— This is symptomatic, sure, but I do believe in painting's eventual return, in a form of painting that gradually turns back to nature. Because painting has a deeper imaginative power than any form of known abstraction we might imagine in opposition. Today, paint is often only poured, applied in monochrome, or juxtaposed on two colored surfaces next to each other. I don't want to be misunderstood—there are great pictures among these. But much of it is just floor painting. On the floor, almost anything works: you tip over a bucket of paint, pour oil against it, draw a line, and you're done. Ideally on a five-by-five-meter canvas, then it looks impressive too. I don't paint on the floor myself. I face the image head on, that's important to me. I have a conversation with the picture, and either it answers or it doesn't. Then I work on it for half a year, or it's ready in two days. These are principles I stay true to. I have an ideology, and it invites comparison—with artists who really painted.

How do you recognize quality?

Quality painting can only be recognized when you really look at paintings. From a painterly point of view, I am a child of the late-18th and early-19th centuries. Early Manet, Goya—now *that* is wonderful. They made everything possible. Gustave Courbet and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes too. For me, theirs were personal encounters with nature that ultimately led to abstraction. If you look at *Still Life with Asparagus* (c. 1885–90) by Carl Schuch, how he reduced the objects, you can already see the origin of cubism. Cubism was a way of working that conquered the world. The same applies to tachisme and abstract expressionism. There are not that many painters who really achieved anything—Franz Kline, for example, who is still in the shadow of Willem de Kooning, the "hero." And then came that fatal fabrication, Andy Warhol, who diluted everything. He immediately started using methods such as screen printing, which was then celebrated as painting. What a joke. I am quite willing to say that Warhol is art, just as I accept that a performance by Allan Kaprow can be art—but it has nothing to do with painting. Painting is emphatic. It either explodes in the viewer's mind or it doesn't. It triggers the imagination or leaves it cold. Everything else is explanation, consciousness, comprehensibility.

> "I am quite willing to say that Warhol is art, just as I accept that a performance by Allan Kaprow can be art—but it has nothing to do with painting"

Sign for the annual student exhibition of Markus Lüpertz's class, 2009

After your formative time in Düsseldorf, the institution lost its appeal and much of its reputation. In the years that followed, the Städelschule in Frankfurt seems to have developed the pull and impact that once emanated from Düsseldorf. Have you been following this development?

— It's actually the same as everywhere else. Learning the art of painting, and historically thinking through visual art, was systematically suppressed and replaced by something more performative. I do not criticize this, but I do observe an increasing externalization of the academy through public pressure. Visual art is not tied to a particular time—that's what makes it so powerful. It is defined solely by those who create it. Yet painting was pushed to the back. And today, it's often only an artist's market value that counts. Gerhard Richter, for example, a great artist, whom I appreciate very much, is hardly ever considered critically anymore. His paintings are simply assumed to be significant because they cost 20 million Euros. But who even looks closely at those pictures anymore? Even Richter seems to hate this state of affairs.

Georg Baselitz never taught at Düsseldorf, but he shared your gallerist, Michael Werner, with Jörg Immendorff and A.R. Penck, artists who did.

— Within our group at the Michael Werner Gallery, Baselitz was the leader, the pacesetter. Penck acted as chief ideologist and writer. Immendorff and I were the young geniuses: loud and irreverent. It was a very good constellation. Jörg was a fantastic professor. He was a shaman, a fascinating character. I campaigned for him to be appointed to a professorship and publicly defended him when the scandal surrounding him surfaced in 2003. I found the whole affair perfidious on many levels, especially as he was terminally ill then.

How did you feel the Düsseldorf academy fared under Tony Cragg and Rita McBride?

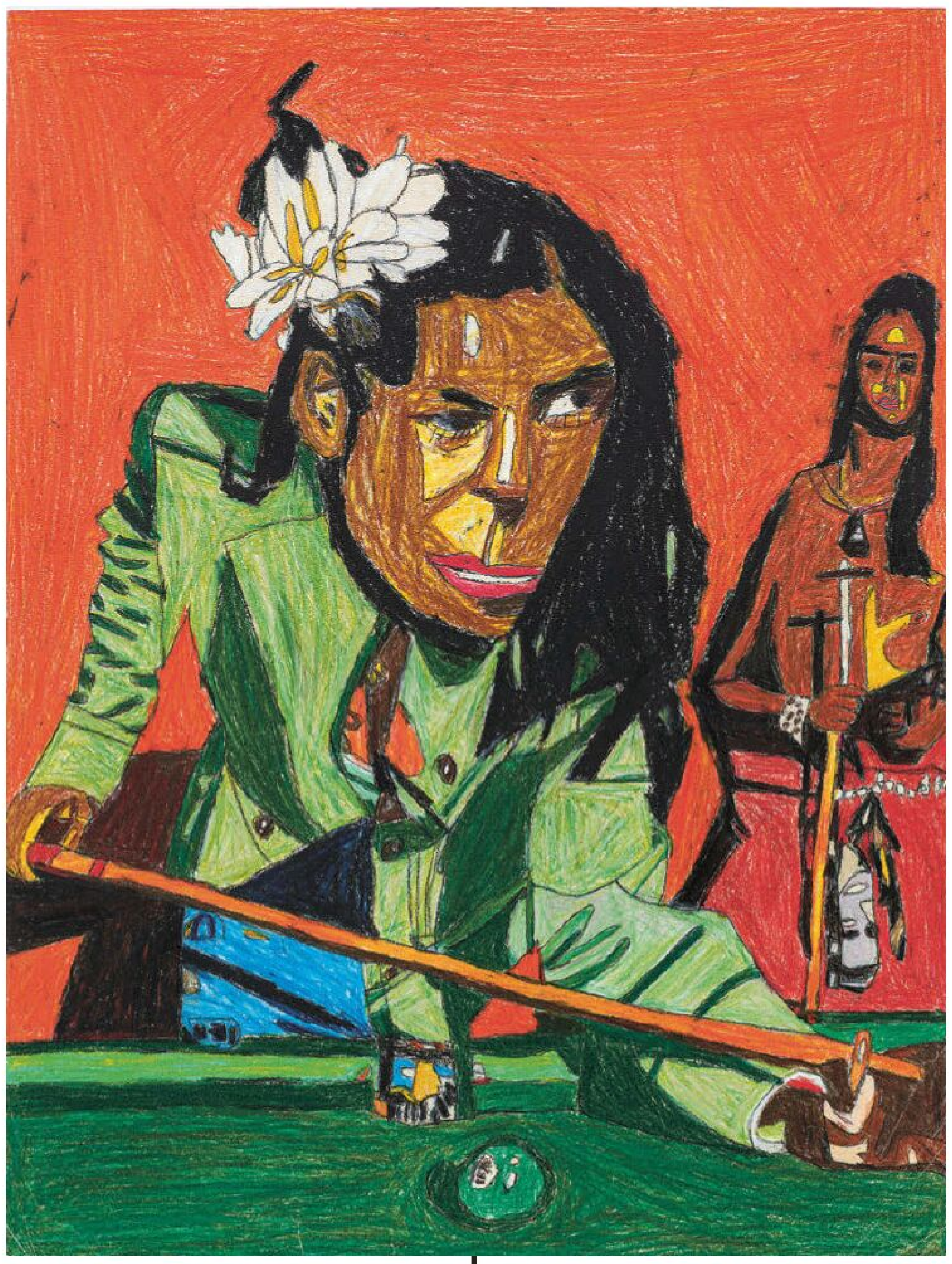
— Succession is never easy. Tony tried for four years to stabilize the situation. Rita continued the attempt and failed. I haven't been back there for a long time, because I no longer see clear ideas there. The academy as it appears today is no longer my kind of world. It now needs to develop its own ideas and realize them. I see it as my personal failure that I couldn't make it into a *School of Athens*. But there is a growing desire for places like that again—I can sense it more and more.

KLASSE
LÜPERTZ
←

SELF-TAUGHT ARTISTS THAT BRING ME JOY

by

KAWS



1. TERRA CLENDENING
2. MICHAEL LEVELL
3. HELEN RAE
4. SUSAN TE KAHURANGI KING
5. DAN MILLER
6. MARLON MULLEN
7. YUICHIRO UKAI
8. WILLIAM SCOTT
9. NICOLE STORM
10. MONICA VALENTINE

KAWS is an artist based in New York

SPOONS FROM HEAVEN

by

Fabian Schöneich

These are my favorite spoons I've collected while traveling the skies

1. LAUDA AIR
2. SINGAPORE AIRLINES
3. SWISS
4. LUFTHANSA
5. ETIHAD AIRWAYS
6. ICELANDAIR
7. SAS
8. CHINA AIRLINES
9. EMIRATES
10. TURKISH AIRLINES

Fabian Schöneich is a curator and the founder of CCA Berlin

BEST GIGS OF 2025 SO FAR

by

Geoff Dyer

1. JEFF PARKER ETA IVTET
Big Ears Festival, Knoxville, Tennessee

2. LONNIE HOLLEY
Big Ears

3. [AHMED]
Big Ears (two consecutive nights)

4. BRÌGHDE CHAIMBEUL
Big Ears

5. JAKE XERXES FUSSELL
McCabe's Guitar Shop, Santa Monica, California

6. THE NECKS
Café Oto, London (four shows, eight sets over two days)

7. THE MESSTHETICS AND JAMES BRANDON LEWIS
Café Oto

8. DUG
O'Shea's Pub, Borris, Ireland

9. GHOSTED (OREN AMBARCHI, JOHAN BERTHLING, ANDREAS WERLIIN)
Atonal Festival, Berlin

10. WATER DAMAGE
Café Oto

Geoff Dyer is an author based in Los Angeles

FRUITS & VEGETABLES

by

Angela Stief

1. The medjool date is considered the queen of dates. Its creamy caramel flavor and sensual sweetness easily beat any form of industrial sugar or artificial sweeteners.

2. Summer would be unthinkable without large, red, juicy watermelons. In fall and winter, they are replaced by pumpkins. Both belong to the same family, the Cucurbitaceae.

3. The lemon, which is used to make healthy lemon water that is best drunk in the morning on an empty stomach, is considered the number one detox fruit with immune-boosting properties.

4. The avocado belongs to the laurel family and is botanically speaking a berry. It is a nutrient-rich superfruit, from whose pit you can even grow your own tree on the balcony.

5. Small blueberries, especially their wild variety, which are mainly available frozen or dried in our region, are healthy little helpers that are said to work wonders.

6. The natural spiciness of ginger root, which can be consumed in the form of the currently popular ginger shot, for example, can be addictive.

7. Not a day goes by without freshly squeezed juice from celery stalks or celery plants. Drinking celery juice in the morning makes your skin beautiful and soft and gives you an inner glow.

8. Spirulina, the healthy powdered freshwater microalgae, is available not only in green but also in bright cyan blue, giving every drink or dish a natural-artificial touch.

9. Bananas are an indispensable ingredient in almost every smoothie. Frozen, they can be used to conjure up the most delicious nice creams.

10. Potatoes and their sweet variety from the nightshade family come in an endless array of types. The tubers are best eaten cooked and cooled, which produces a valuable dietary fiber: resistant starch.

Angela Stief is the director of Albertina Modern, Vienna

MOST SURREAL GRATEFUL DEAD SONGS

by

Dan Nadel

Our exhibition focused entirely on visual art of the long 1960s, but we cannot think about Surreal Sixties *without thinking about the Grateful Dead, so I present the most surreal Grateful Dead songs of the era.*

1. COSMIC CHARLIE, 1969

2. THE GOLDEN ROAD (TO UNLIMITED DEVOTION), 1967

3. DARK STAR, 1968

4. ST. STEPHEN, 1969

5. RIPPLE, 1970

6. THAT'S IT FOR THE OTHER ONE, 1968

7. CANDYMAN, 1970

8. BOX OF RAIN, 1970

9. CHINA CAT SUNFLOWER, 1969

10. DIRE WOLF, 1970

Dan Nadel is the Curator of Drawings and Prints at the Whitney and co-curated its current *Sixties Surreal* exhibition

BERLIN'S ELITE ASIAN EATERIES

by

Kaifan Wang

1. JOLLY
The Peking duck here is unmatched in Germany—crispy, aromatic, and perfectly served. Located by Museum Island, it's also a favorite of former chancellor Angela Merkel.

2. NIKUYA YAKINIKU JAPANESE BBQ
A true paradise for beef lovers—premium Wagyu with a fun grill-it-yourself concept in a cozy, modern setting.

3. 0086
Always bustling and smoky with authentic Sichuan flavors. A favorite among Chinese diners craving the real taste of home.

4. MING DYNASTIE
A long-standing institution whose quality has remained reliable for years—the go-to place when you just don't know what else to eat.

5. HOU TANG
Stylish and youthful, this is Berlin's best destination for hot pot—perfect for sharing and warming evenings with friends.

6. CO DO HUE
The best place in town for a steaming bowl of Bún bò Hu—fragrant, spicy, and deeply satisfying.

7. HÄNGBOK
Comforting, home-style Korean cuisine with hearty portions and authentic flavors.

8. FEAST
Lovely interior and elegant atmosphere, offering refined dishes inspired by the lighter flavors of the Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces.

9. CAFÉ KOMINE
A dessert gem run by a Le Cordon Bleu chef—delicate cakes with layered textures, especially the matcha creations. Open only on weekends.

10. CHARLIE'S TEA BERLIN
If you're a bubble-tea lover, don't miss this Chinese brand—strong tea base, creamy toppings, and rich flavors.

Kaifan Wang is an artist based in Berlin

ROMANTIC DEATHS

by
Agnes Gryczkowska

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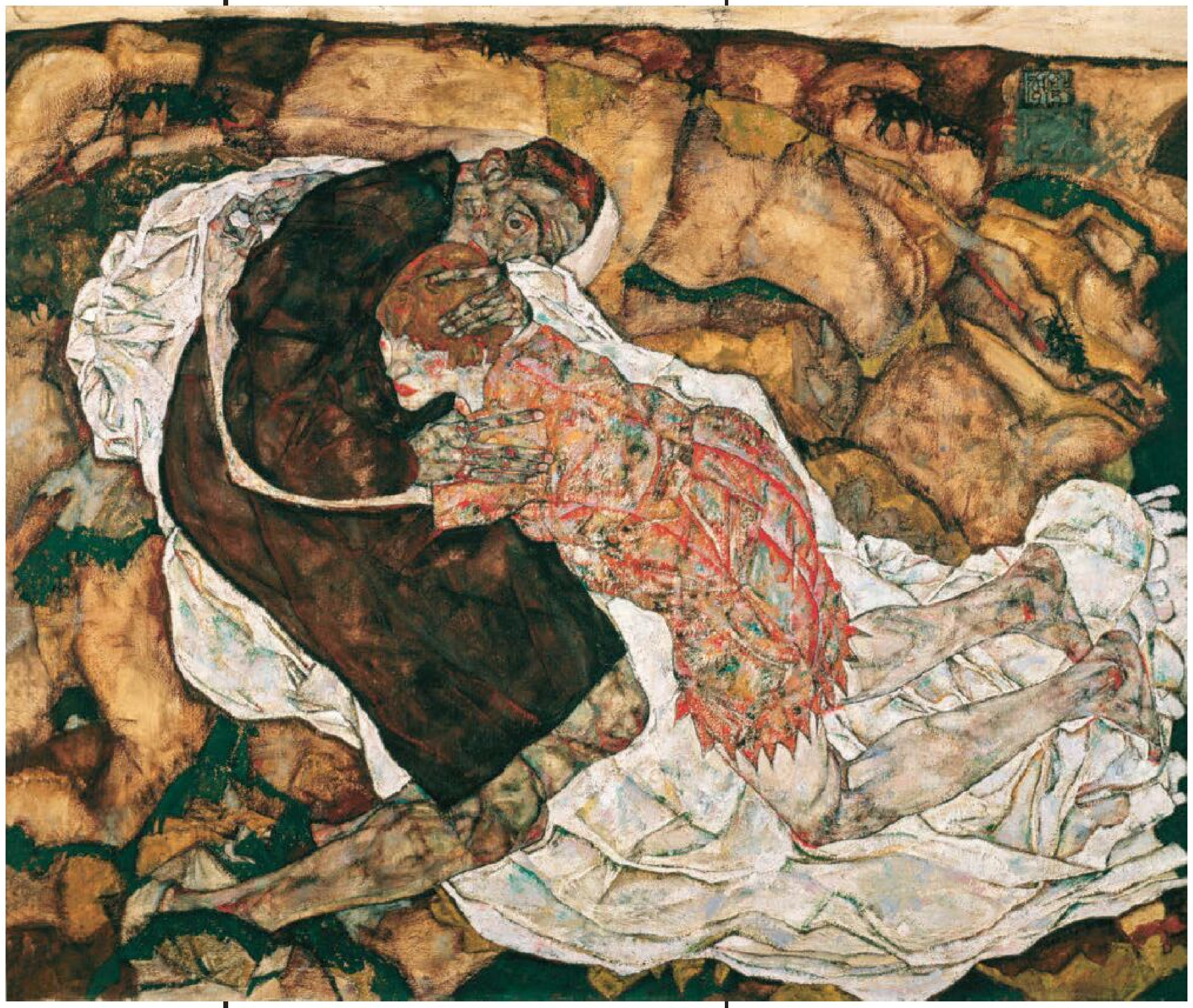
1. JOAN OF ARC'S DEATH, 1431
Oh, to burn at the stake!

2. THE ANGELS HOVERING OVER THE BODY OF CHRIST IN THE SEPULCHRE, c. 1805, *William Blake*
Death so celestial.

3. A PHILOSOPHICAL ENQUIRY INTO THE ORIGIN OF OUR IDEAS OF THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL, 1757, *Edmund Burke*
Death as the martyr of beauty.



4. THE RITE OF SPRING, 1913, *Igor Stravinsky*
A young girl, offered to the God of Spring, dances herself to death.

5. DEATH OF THE HORSE IN ANDREI RUBLEV, 1966, *Andrei Tarkovsky*
Shot in the neck by Tarkovsky rather than slaughtered at the slaughterhouse …

6. MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS, 2012, *Arvo Pärt & Else Torp*. Based on Robert Burns's 1789 poem.
Death when the body remains, but the heart is elsewhere.

7. DEATH AND THE MAIDEN, 1915–16, *Egon Schiele*
Love grasping at life.

8. STORY OF THE EYE, 1928, *Georges Bataille*
Ecstasy dissolving into death.

9. 4.48 PSYCHOSIS, 1999, *Sarah Kane*
"I have resigned myself to death this year."

10. APOCALYPSE, 1498, *Albrecht Dürer*
Death by divine wrath.

Agnes Gryczkowska is a curator based in London

HAPPY AMERICAN SUMMER

by
Artem Nanushyan

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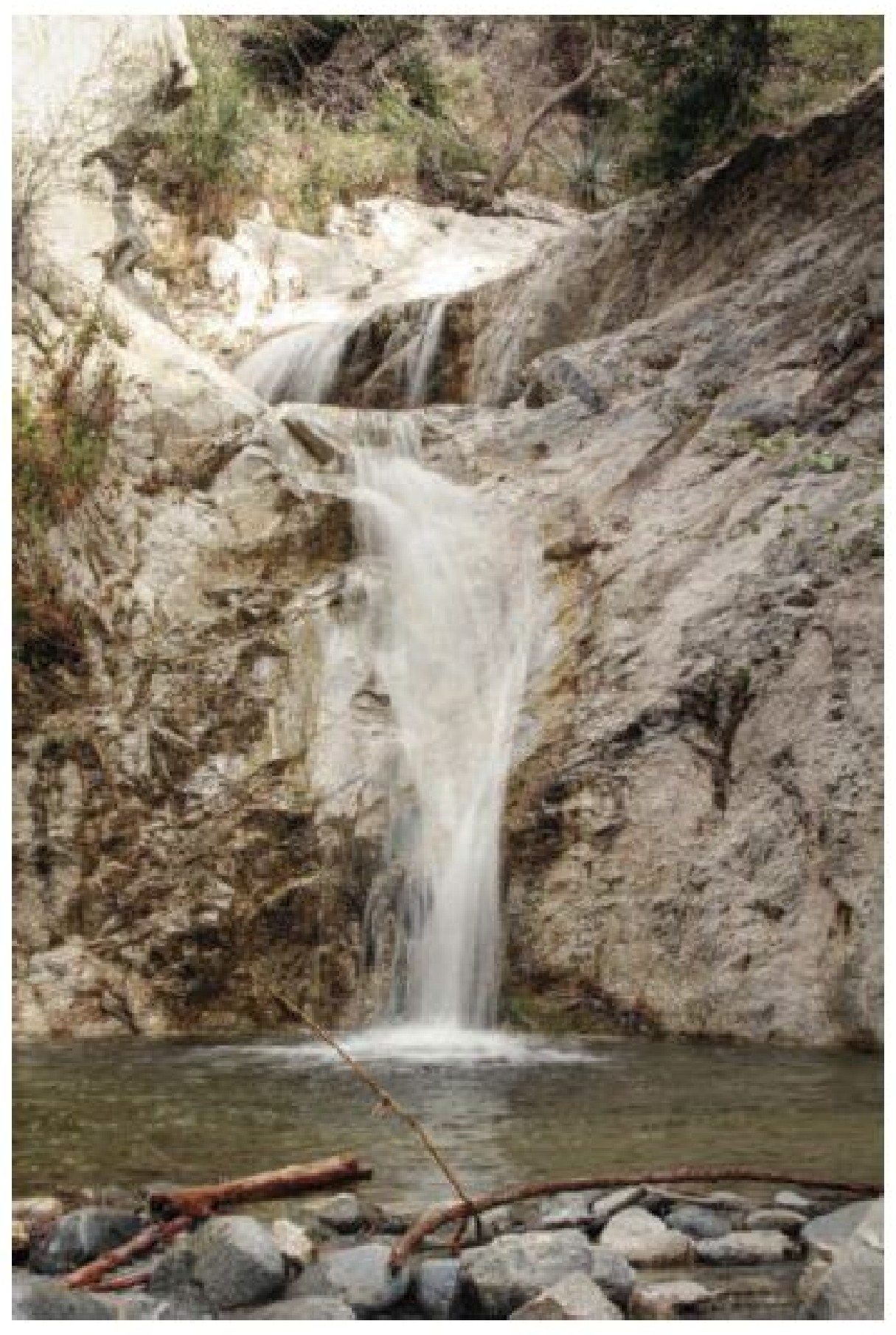
1. Café 2001 in Downtown LA.

2. Prime rib and horseradish at Lawry's.

3. Switzer Falls trail in the shade of the trees.

4. Werner talking shit, Jill throwing shit in Colorado.



5. Tchaikovsky at the Hollywood Bowl.

6. The Andy Warhol Museum was cool.

7. Fallingwater idk not impressed.

8. Encounters with animals: owl, deer, moose, skunk, hawk, possum.

9. Our poodle Dima's seventh birthday.

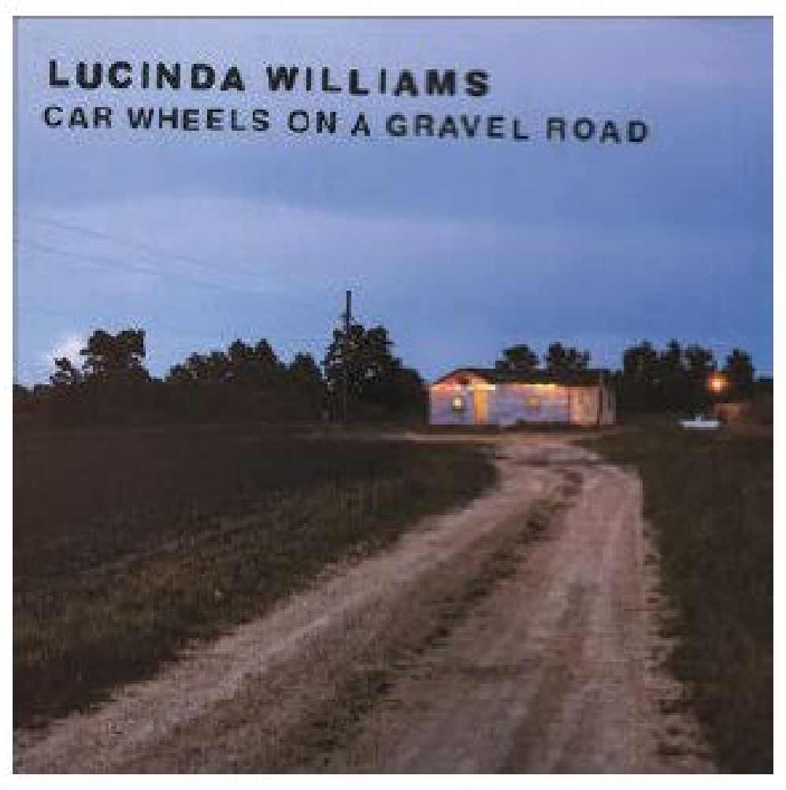
10. Visiting the lovely Cedars-Sinai after a chainsaw accident.

Artem Nanushyan is an artist based in Los Angeles

SONGS ABOUT ANGELS

by

Travis MacDonald


LUCINDA WILLIAMS
CAR WHEELS ON A GRAVEL ROAD

1. DRUNKEN ANGEL,
1998
Lucinda Williams

SIERRA'S BARBER SHOP
DROP NINETEENS DELAWARE

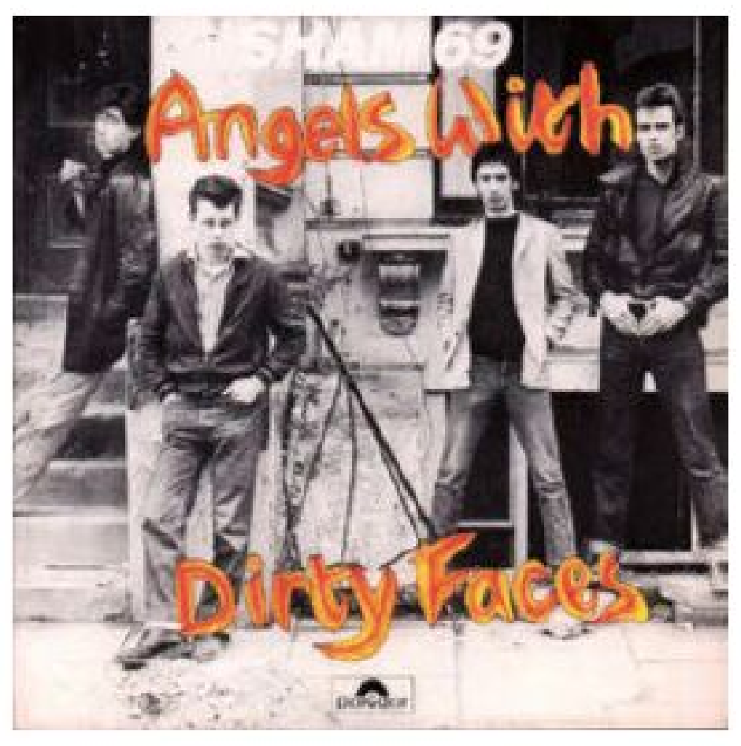
2. ANGEL,
1992
Drop Nineteens

3. THE FIERY ANGEL,
1997, *3Ds*

MADONNA ANGEL

4. ANGEL,
1984
Madonna

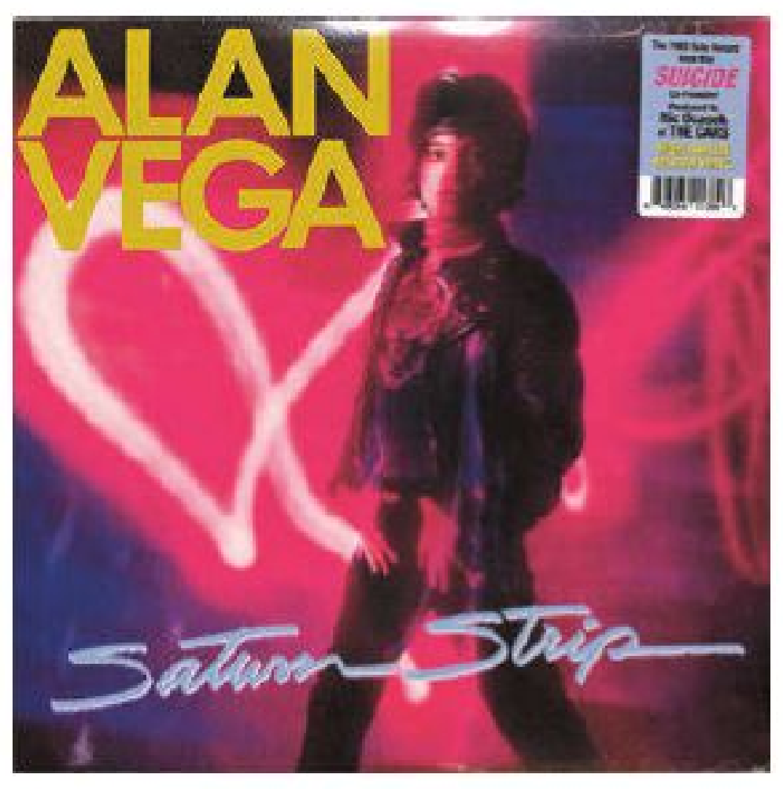
5. THE BLACK ANGEL'S DEATH SONG, 1967
The Velvet Underground


SHAM 69
Angels With
Dirty Faces

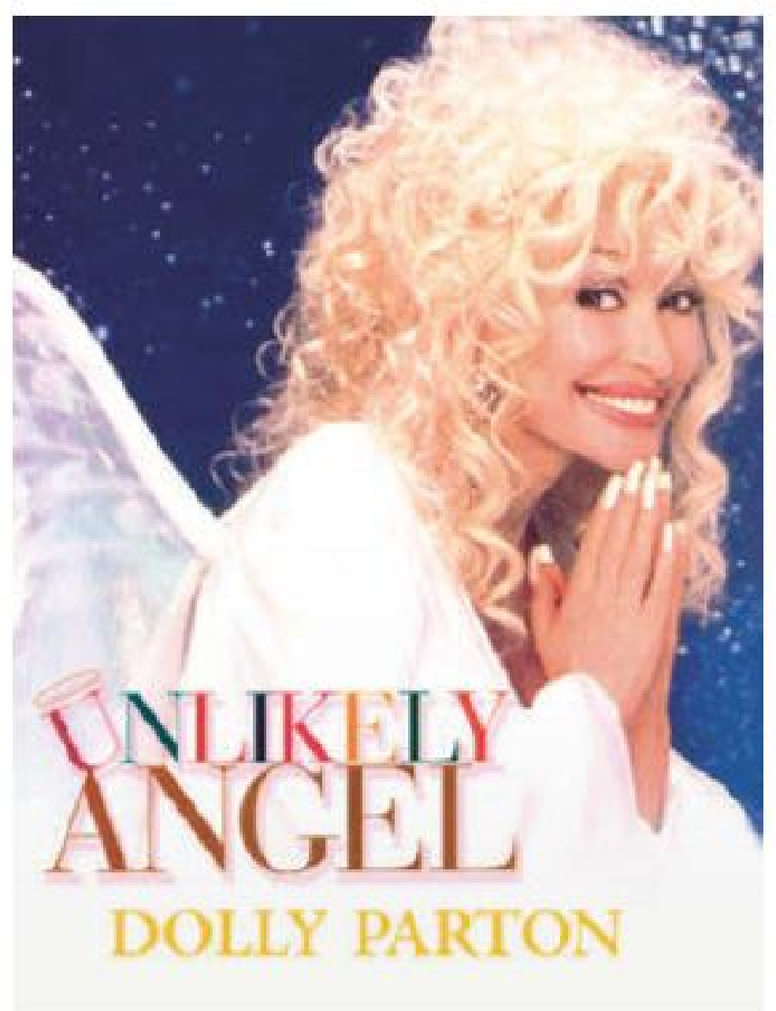
6. ANGELS WITH DIRTY FACES,
1978
Sham 69

REIGN IN BLOOD
PARENTAL ADVISORY EXPLICIT CONTENT

7. ANGEL OF DEATH,
1986
Slayer


ALAN VEGA
Saturn Strip

8. ANGEL,
1983
Alan Vega


UNLIKELY ANGEL
DOLLY PARTON

9. UNLIKELY ANGEL,
1996
Dolly Parton

10. DEMONS AND ANGELS, 2018
A Boogie Wit da Hoodie feat. Juice WRLD

Travis MacDonald is a painter based in Berlin

WALK OF FAME

by

Calla Henkel

Nine things you won't regret buying on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and one thing you will

1. CAESAR SALAD AND FRENCH FRIES AT MUSSO & FRANK
There is nothing like transitioning from the electric envelope of Hollywood Blvd to the dimly lit past that is Musso & Frank.

2. A FAKE ACADEMY AWARD
My favorite ones have plaques for the unexpected celebrity in your life: Best Dentist, Best Lawyer, Best Brother-in-Law. Keeping a fake Oscar in your medicine cabinet is always chic.

3. A COCKTAIL FROM THE FROLIC ROOM
While you drink said cocktail, find an old man at the bar who will tell you how great Hollywood used to be. That's the real show.

4. "MY FRIENDS WENT TO HOLLYWOOD AND ALL I GOT WAS THIS CRUMMY TOWEL" NOVELTY HAND TOWEL
Sold at select gift stores on the strip. Looks both great and desperate in a bathroom.

5. A COFFEE AND A POWERBALL TICKET FROM 7-ELEVEN
Real participation in the metaphor that is the Walk of Fame requires warm caffeine and blind faith.

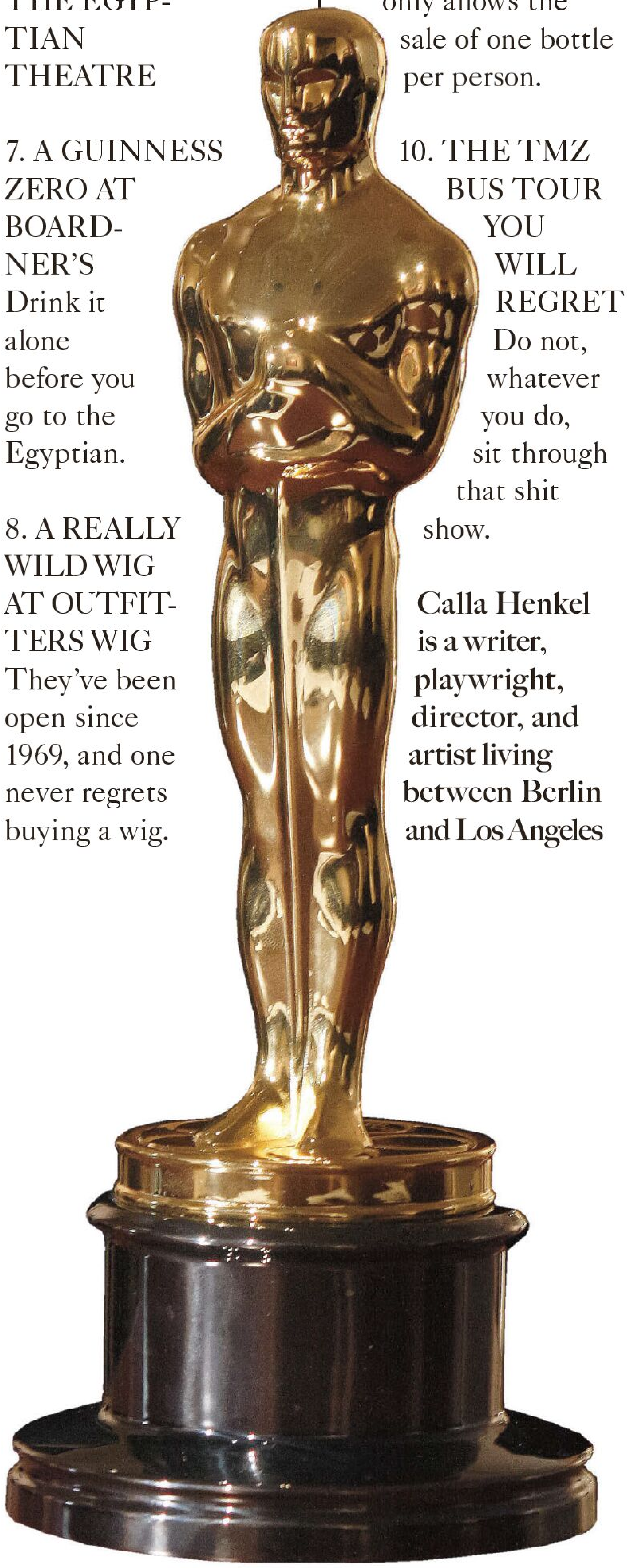
6. A TICKET TO WHATEVER'S PLAYING AT THE EGYPTIAN THEATRE

7. A GUINNESS ZERO AT BOARDNER'S
Drink it alone before you go to the Egyptian.

8. A REALLY WILD WIG AT OUTFITTERS WIG
They've been open since 1969, and one never regrets buying a wig.

9. SABRINA'S CHOICE CALIFORNIA OLIVE OIL
Sold on Sundays at the Hollywood Farmers' Market. Sabrina's got a stand with the best oil in town. She only allows the sale of one bottle per person.

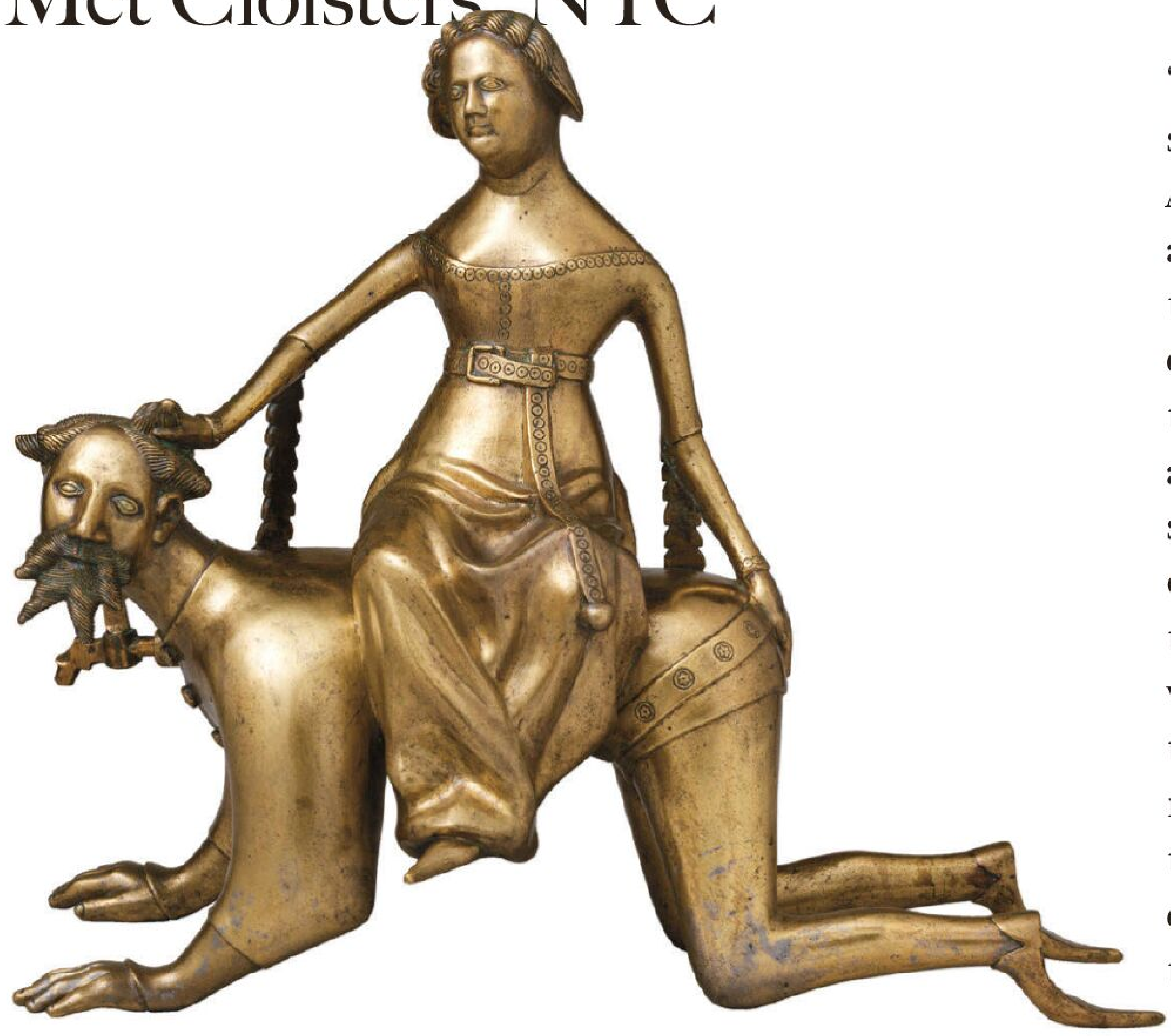
10. THE TMZ BUS TOUR YOU WILL REGRET
Do not, whatever you do, sit through that shit show.



Calla Henkel is a writer, playwright, director, and artist living between Berlin and Los Angeles

SPECTRUM OF DESIRE
The Met Cloisters, NYC

Texts by
DAISY WOODWARD

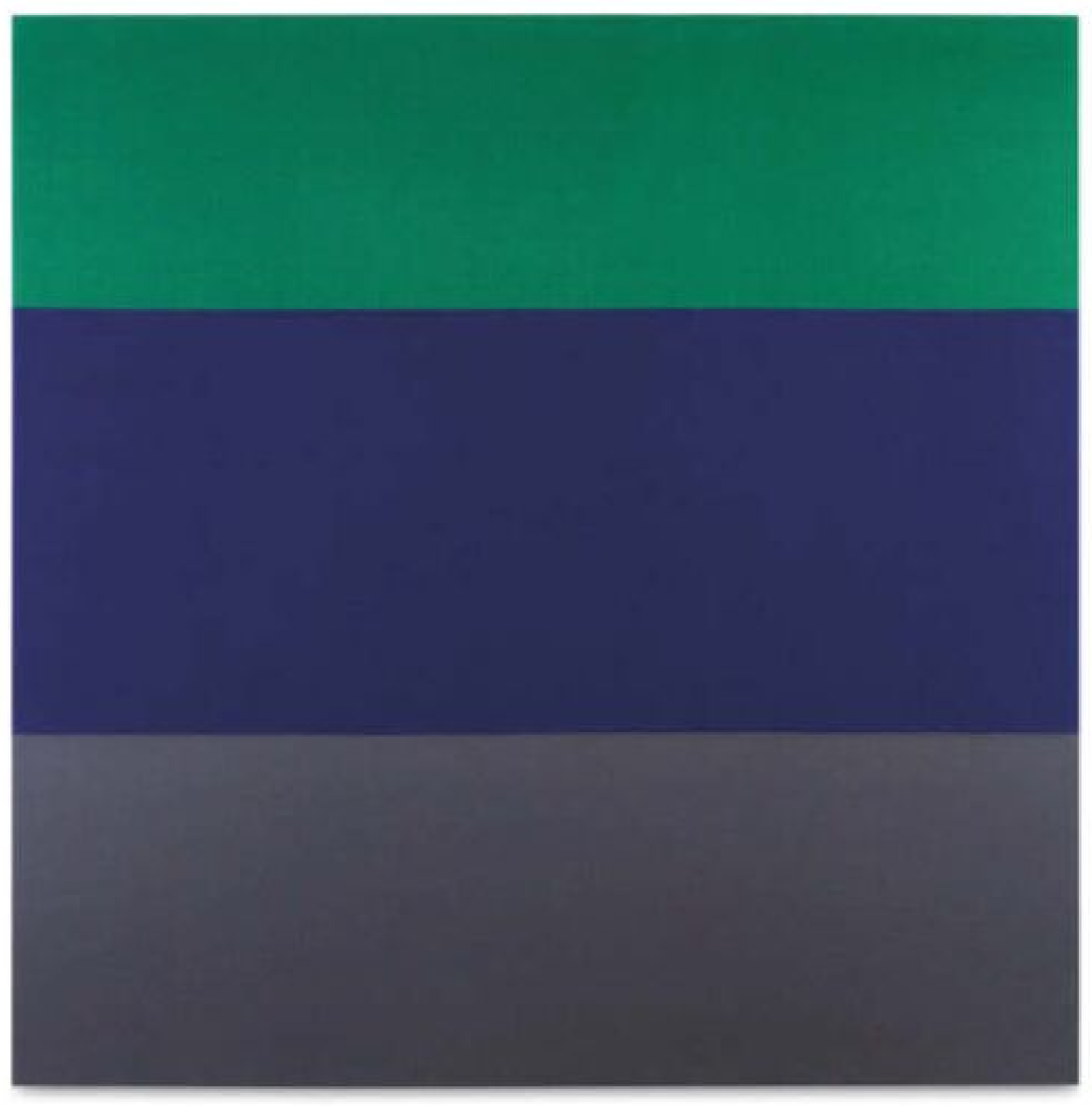


AQUAMANILE IN THE FORM OF ARISTOTLE AND PHYLLIS,
late 14th or early 15th century

"It could be courtly or carnal, sacred or subversive," says the Met of love, sex, and gender in the Middle Ages. Given that much medieval artwork was made to a religious purpose, the museum's latest show hopes to inspire viewers to think more expansively about not only the people who lived in western Europe from the 13th to the 15th centuries, but also their emotions and relationships. On display are gold jewelry, ivory sculptures, stained glass, woven textiles, and more—darting tonally from the serious to the comical, the touching to the evocative. If the pieces themselves weren't enough of a draw, the location seals the deal: the Met Cloisters, comprised of elements from medieval abbeys in Catalonia and France, relocated to New York and incorporated into a setting that evokes age-old European monastic life. A rare coming together of friars and fornication.

October 17, 2025 – March 29, 2026

MINIMAL
Bourse de Commerce, Paris



BLINKY PALERMO, *Untitled*, 1970

This fall, the Pinault Collection will share its rich and multifaceted lens on minimal art at the Bourse de Commerce, with works by Dan Flavin, Robert Ryman, On Kawara, François Morellet, Agnes Martin, and 35 others. Pulling together different manifestations of minimal art from around the world—Japanese Mono-ha, Brazilian concrete art, the German Zero movement, among others—the exhibition organizes them into a number of threads that are then drawn into conversation with one another. Visitors will find Charlotte Posenenske's modular steel sculptures, participatory works by Félix González-Torres, and other reflections on light, simplicity, and the environment—all embodying, what the museum terms, "reduction as a living artistic practice." In an ironic turn for a former center of trade, the maxim "less is more"—for now—rings out loud and true.

October 8, 2025 – January 19, 2026

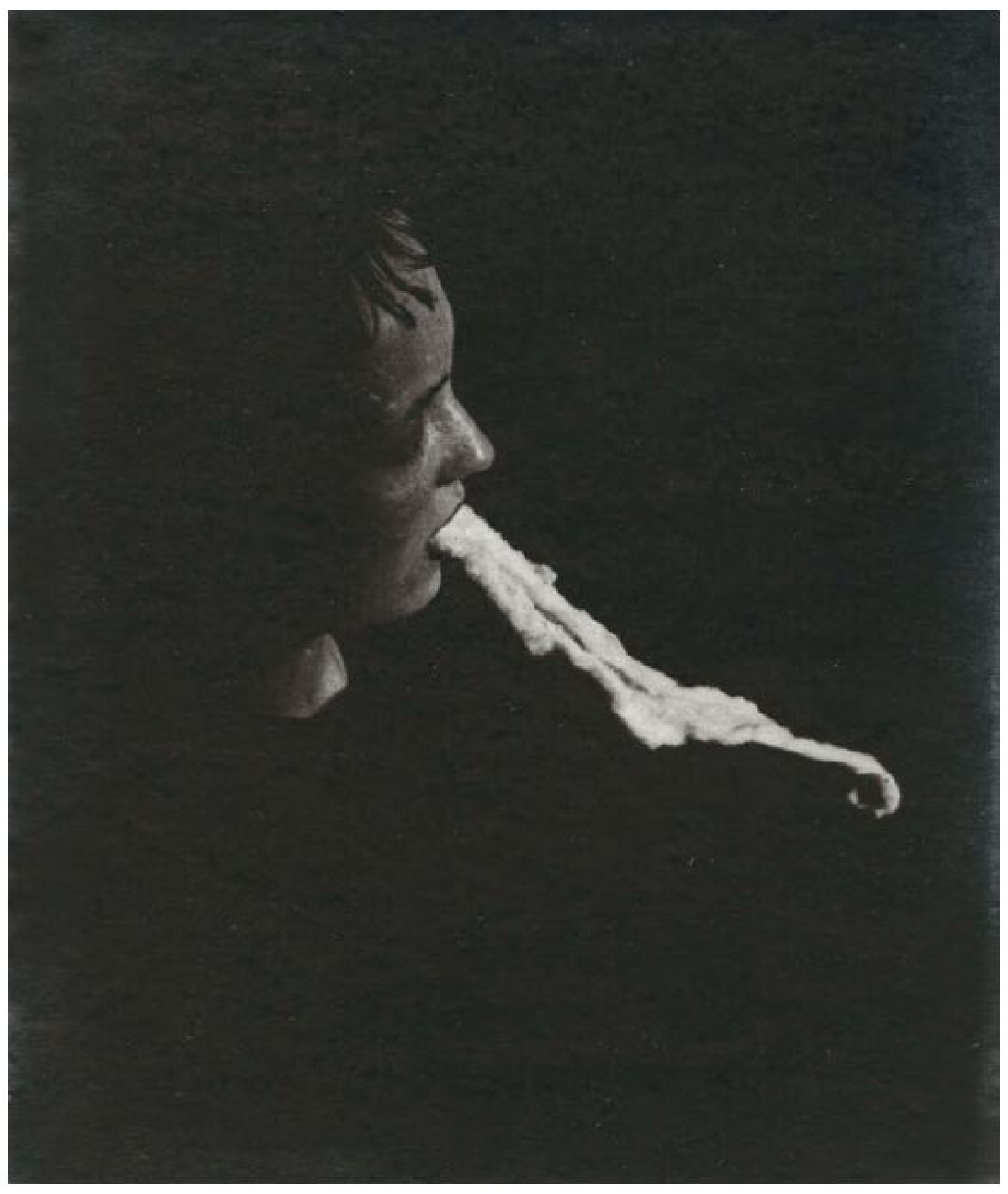
JON RAFMAN: 9 EYES
Louisiana Museum, Humlebæk

CL. 51, MEDELLÍN, ANTIOQUIA, 2019

Google Street View has become such an omnipotent and innocuous presence in contemporary culture that it's easy to overlook its dystopian ambition. Canadian artist Jon Rafman has no intention of letting us forget. His pioneering and never-ending piece *9 Eyes*, which he's been developing since 2008, looks afresh at the tech giant's mission when, in 2007, it first sent out a fleet of hybrid cars, each one equipped with cameras, GPS, and laser scanners, intending to photograph every path, road, and highway on the planet. For the work, Rafman archives the strange situations and eerie phenomena captured by Google; images that will be on display at the Louisiana Museum alongside a new film. Considering everything from the everyday to the existential, the exhibition is a compelling invocation to interrogate our relationship with digital technology and surveillance.

October 8, 2025 – January 11, 2026

GHOSTS
Kunstmuseum Basel

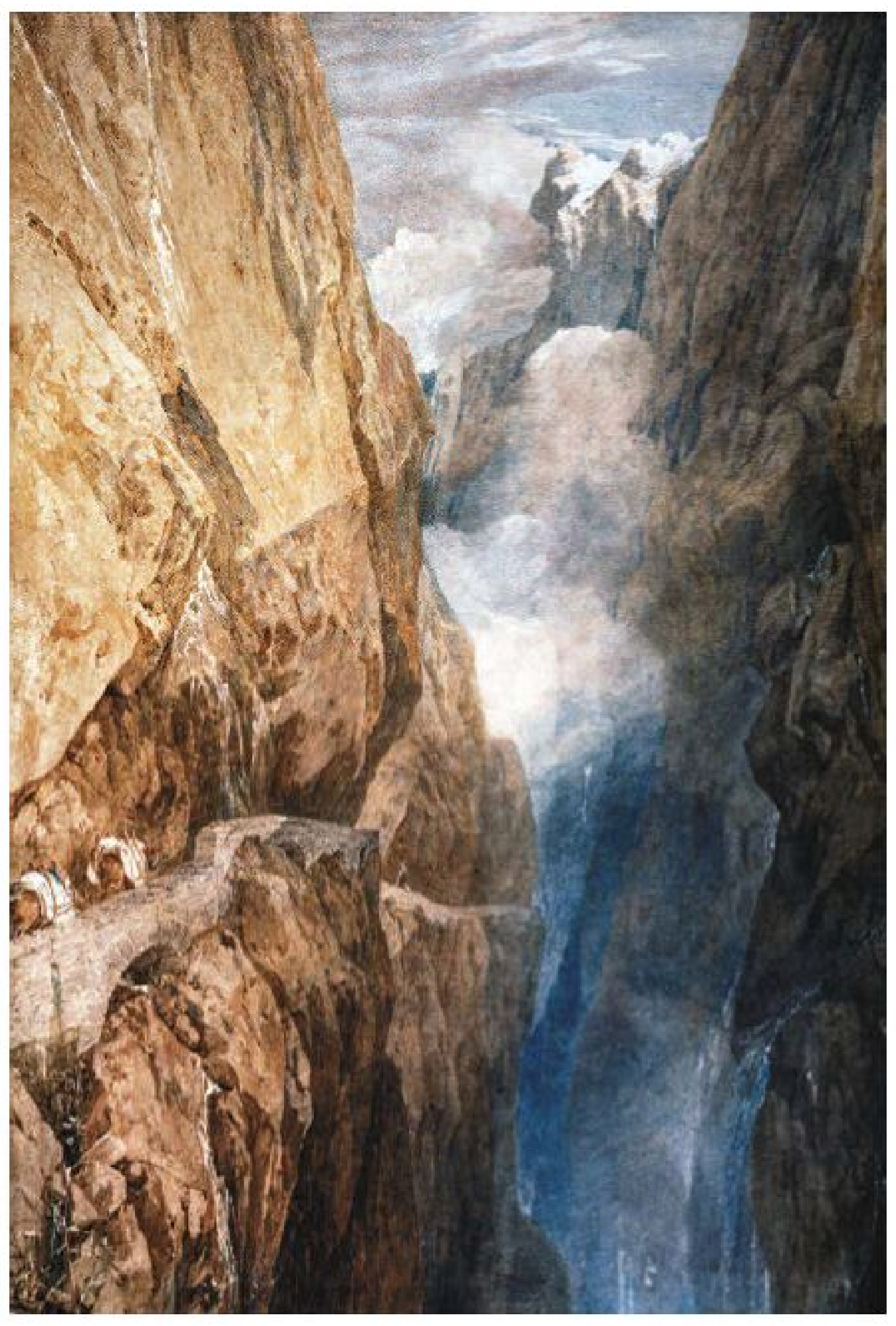


ALBERT VON SCHRENCK-NOTZING
Telepathic Mass That Flows Out of the Mouth of the Medium Stanisława P. and Remains in a Floating Position, 1913

Here in good time for All Hallows' Eve, Kunstmuseum Basel's fall exhibition taps into our enduring fascination with the spectral, specifically its manifestation in art from the 19th century to today. Featuring over 160 objects and artworks in different media, the show considers the interest in spirits that arose in the early 1800s—a surprisingly superstitious era for all its talk of science and rationality—as well as the innovations and illusory techniques that further fueled the frenzy for all things supernatural. Ever since, the museum argues, "the concept of the 'ghost' has consistently reflected society's anxieties and obsessions," while serving as scintillating artistic subject matter. From painted ghouls by William Blake, René Magritte, and Nicole Eisenman to sculpted spirits by Meret Oppenheim, Katharina Fritsch, and Tony Oursler; from Mike Kelley's eerie ectoplasm photographs of 1979 to the equally creepy 1920s pictures that inspired them—it is sure to appall and delight.

September 20, 2025 –
March 8, 2026

TURNER AND CONSTABLE: RIVALS AND ORIGINALS
Tate Britain, London

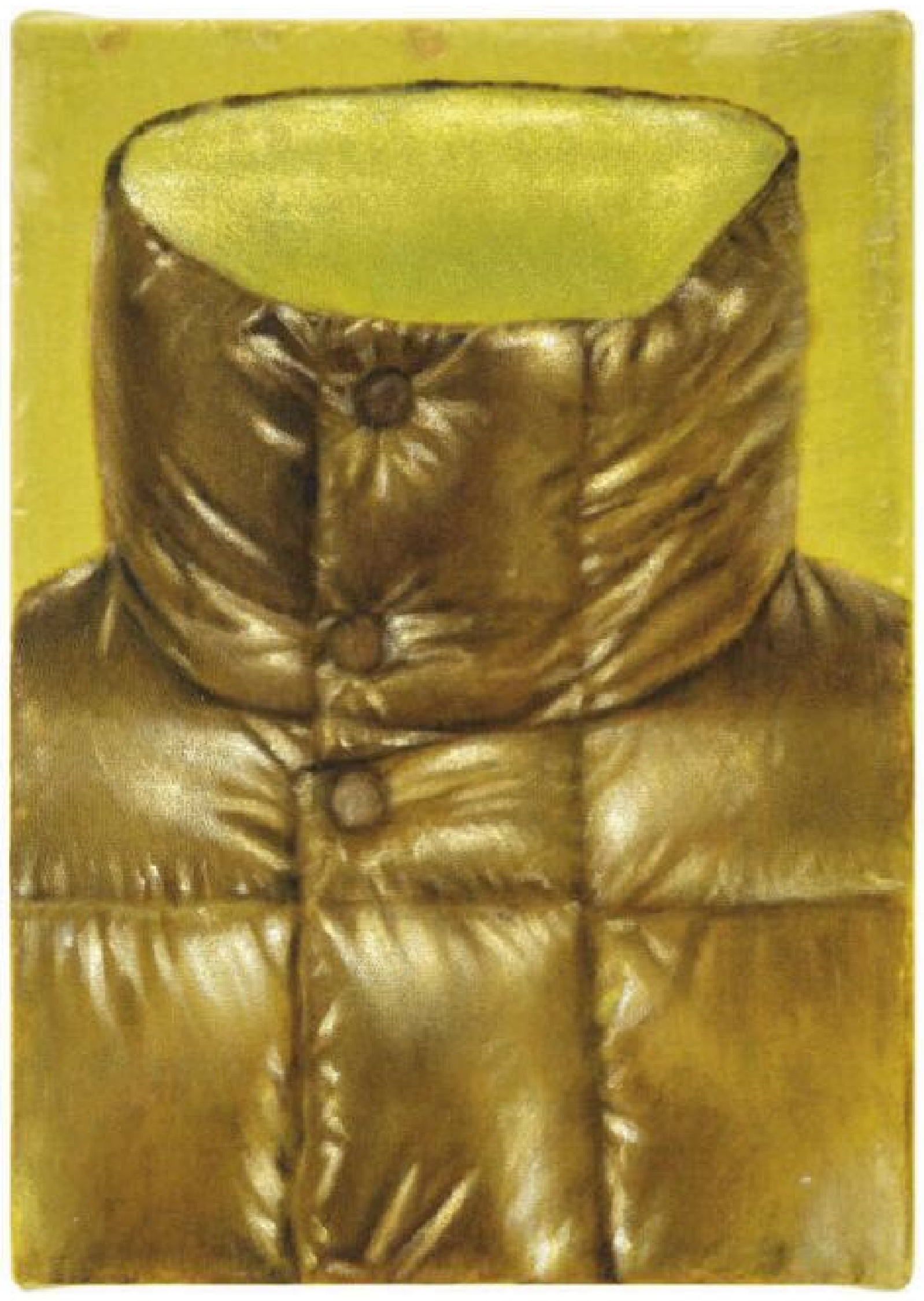


J.M.W. TURNER
The Passage of Mount St Gothard from the Centre of Teufels Broch (Devil's Bridge), 1804

They were, and remain, two of the world's greatest landscape artists, radically turning the genre away from conventional realism into more expressive terrain. Rather extraordinarily—or perhaps not at all—they were born only one year apart. They are, of course, J.M.W. Turner and John Constable, those infamous rivals whose shared interest in defying tradition led to some of the most brilliant paintings in British art. Spanning the 250th anniversary years of their births, a major exhibition at Tate Britain will explore the painters' "intertwined lives and legacies," revealing how they were "celebrated, criticised and pitted against each other, and [thereby] pushed to new and original artistic visions." The show will feature over 170 artworks, its highlights including Turner's dramatic *Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons* (1835), last seen in Britain over a century ago, and Constable's pivotal landscape *The White Horse* (1819), encapsulating the serene beauty of rural England.

November 27, 2025 –
April 12, 2026

ISSY WOOD: MAGIC BULLET
Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin

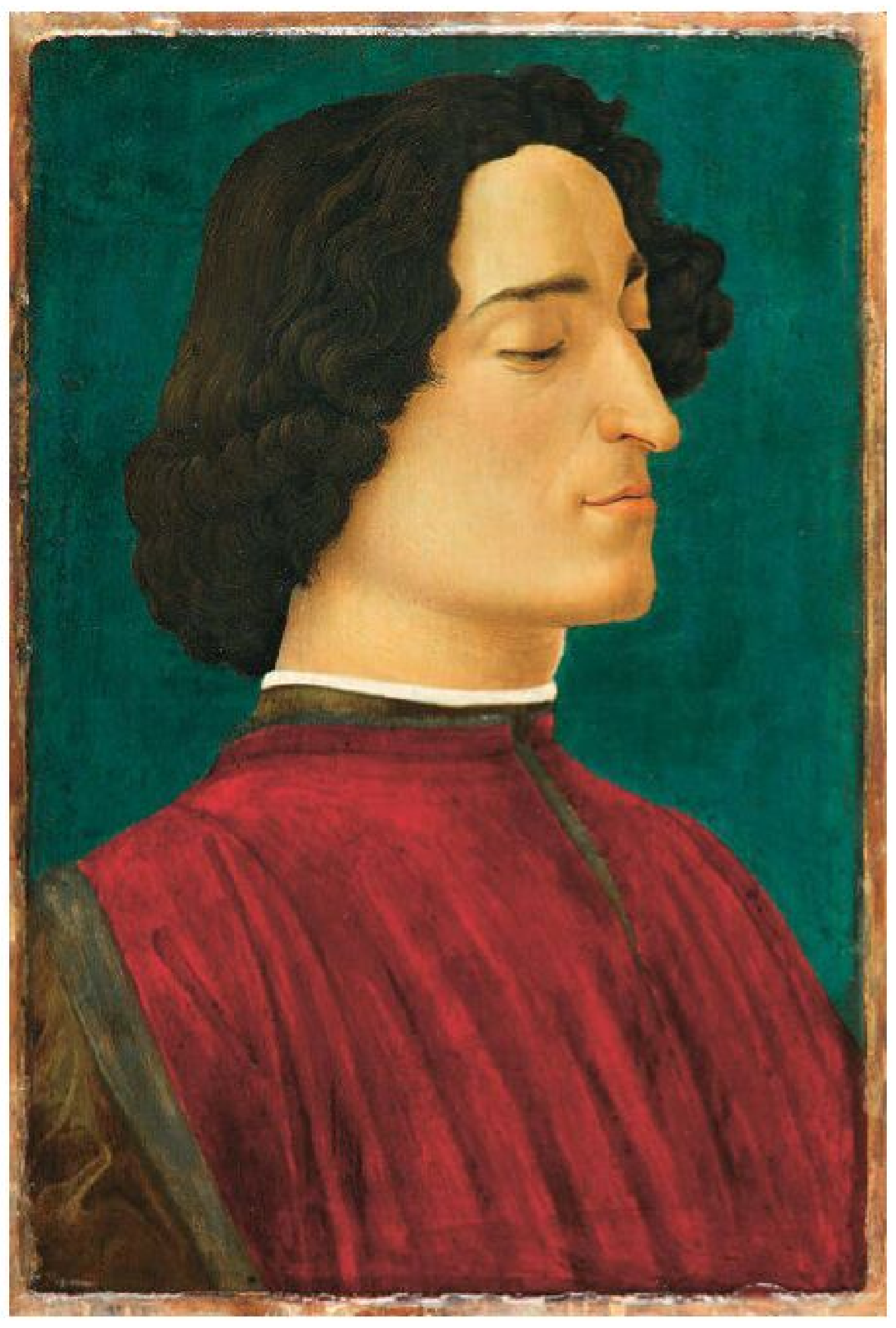


MY NECK/MY SCAPULA , 2025

A dental cast sporting metal braces sits before a bunch of black grapes like a memento mori. An all-too-cute bow-tied bunny is viewed in excessive close-up. These are the conjurings of British artist Issy Wood, who is currently enjoying her first large-scale solo exhibition in Germany. The art critic Barry Schwabsky describes Wood's approach as "perverse realism," but there's surrealism in there too; an old-master exactitude paired with a fondness for vintage trinkets. Sometimes these overlay zoomed-in crops of everyday scenes, at other moments they take center stage, Wood's signature pearly sheen rendering them objects of inexplicable desire. In fact, the artist once revealed that the one overarching theme in her work would "probably be how terrifying desire is." Her investigations of desire traverse inner and outer worlds, drawing on everything from social media to old estate catalogues and classic films. At the Schinkel Pavillon, she has unveiled a new series of paintings under the title *Magic Bullet* (guns are another recurring motif), responding to the site's striking architecture with her typical blend of hyper-modernity and nostalgia.

September 11, 2025 –
January 31, 2026

THE PAZZI CONSPIRACY
Bode-Museum, Berlin

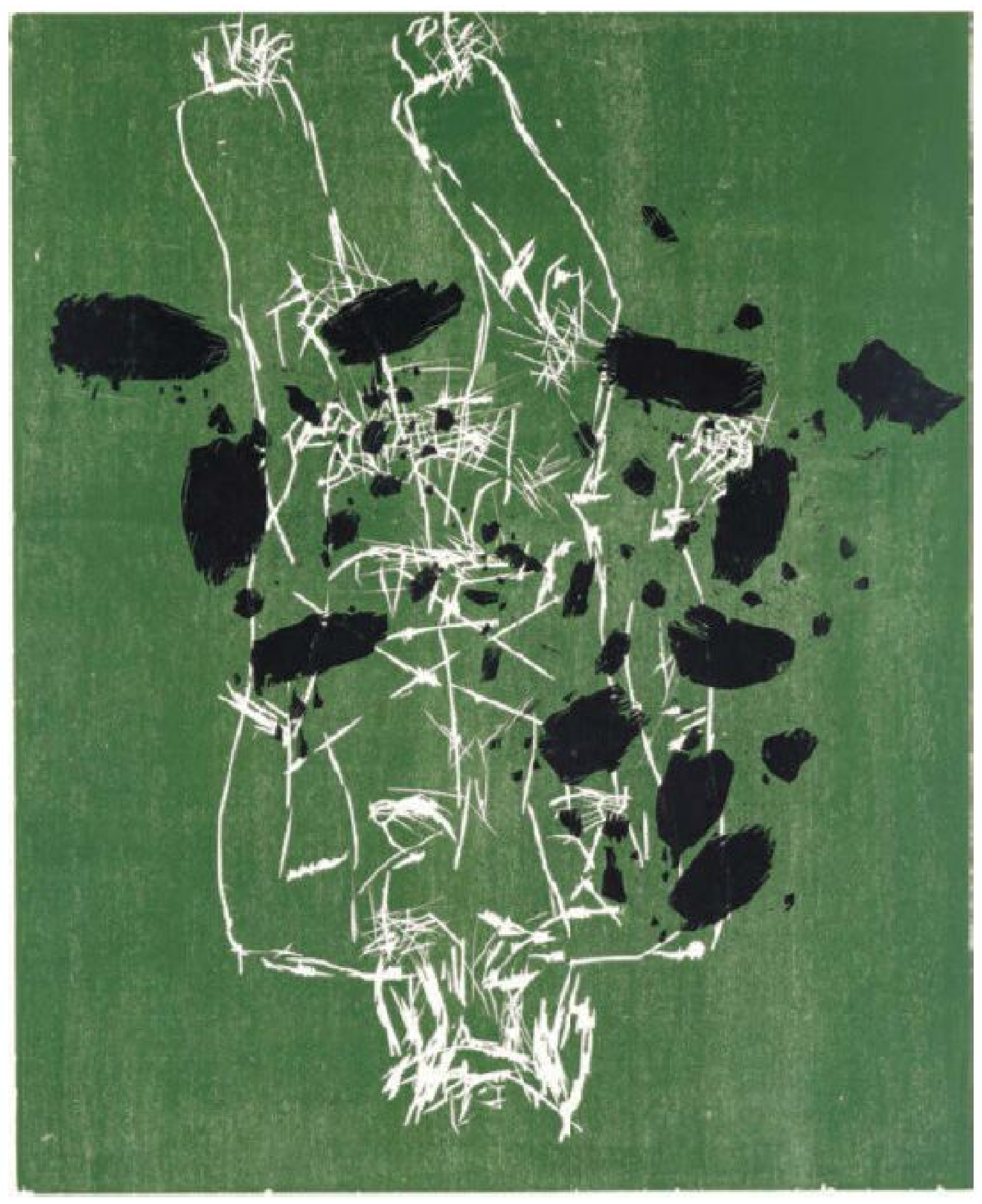


SANDRO BOTTICELLI
Giuliano de' Medici, 1478

One of the most notorious events of Renaissance Italy, the Pazzi Conspiracy saw a powerful, aristocratic family join forces with Pope Sixtus IV in an attempt to overthrow the Medici rule. The plot unfolded on April 26, 1478, during mass at the Florence cathedral, where an assassination attempt was made on the lives of brothers Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici. Giuliano was killed by Francesco Pazzi, but Lorenzo survived with minimal injuries—and a burning desire for revenge. The people of Florence rose up in fierce defense of Lorenzo. Most of the conspirators were killed, and a two-year war with the papacy ensued. Now, the Bode-Museum will bring this tale to vivid life in its new show, drawing on the collections of the Berlin State Museums to re-spin the story for a modern audience. The display will feature medals depicting the episode's central players, alongside sculptures and paintings, including a wonderful Botticelli portrait of Giuliano, with flowing locks and a downcast gaze, painted just after his demise.

October 24, 2025 –
September 20, 2026

GEORG BASELITZ: A LIFE IN PRINT
Kode, Bergen

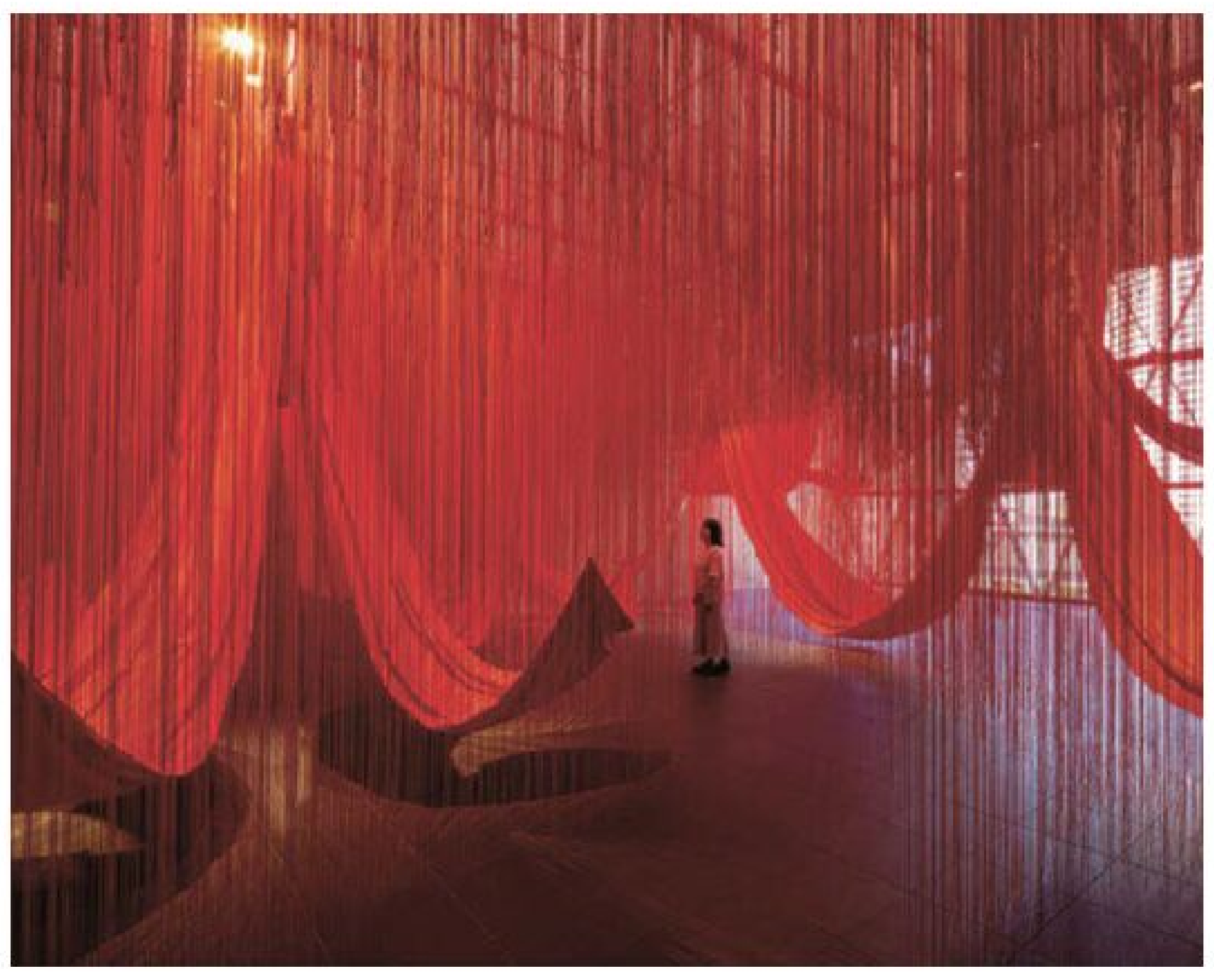


32 PUNKTE, 1991

When Georg Baselitz describes an exhibition of his work as "a show I wanted to witness, [one] that had to happen," you know it's a big deal. The 87-year-old German artist has been the subject of more than 358 solo exhibitions in his lifetime, but none quite like this latest one at Kode, the largest survey of his prints to date. Although better known for his wildly expressionistic paintings merging figuration and abstraction, as well as his wood and bronze sculptures, printmaking has been an integral part of the artist's practice since 1964. Shunning newer technologies such as offset printing in favor of centuries-old techniques like drypoint, aquatint, and woodcut, Baselitz channeled references from Italian mannerist painting to his hero Edvard Munch. *A Life in Print* will reveal all this and more, guiding viewers through the key themes and motifs of the artist's career, ranging from *The Heroes*, his mid-60s series of shattered men in apocalyptic landscapes, through his seminal pictures of eagles and the various portraits of his wife, Elke—which found form in print just as they did in paint, to breathtaking effect.

October 3, 2025 –
February 22, 2026

DREAM ROOMS
M+, Hong Kong

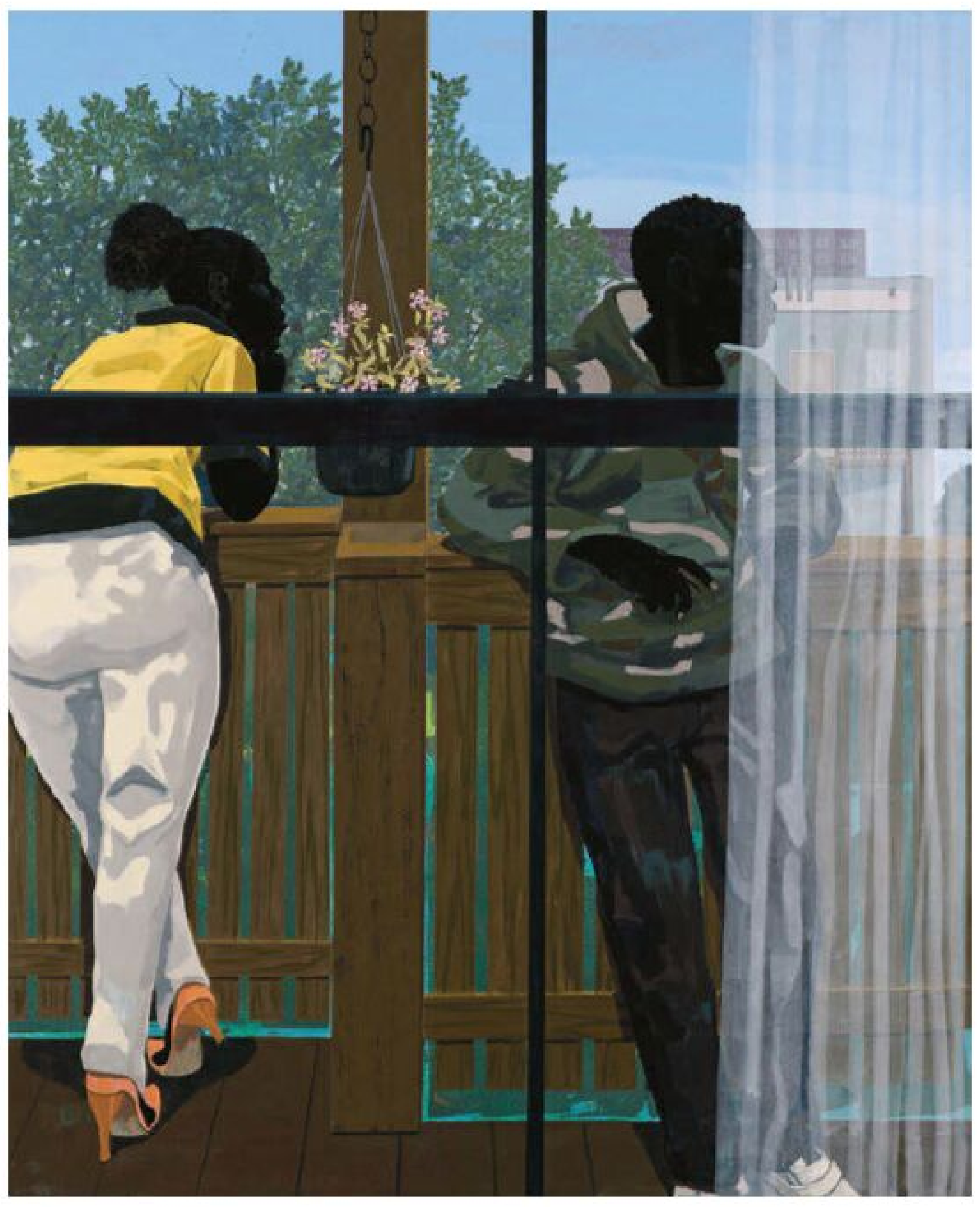


CHIHARU SHIOTA
Internal Line, 2024

In the 1950s and 1960s, artists and audiences alike came to understand that artworks could be experienced not just visually but corporeally, and a new energy arose around art "environments." In these immersive, multi-sensory pieces, visitors were invited to move through and directly interact with the work. Sadly, the ephemeral and unconventional nature of many such works meant they were often lost or destroyed after display, and it is mostly those of male artists that have been remembered. Hong Kong's M+ has reoriented this discussion with its latest exhibition, *Dream Rooms: Environments by Women Artists 1950s–Now*, showcasing 12 pieces by trailblazing artists. These range from ambitious and destabilizing works by the likes of Lygia Clark, Judy Chicago, and Nanda Vigo, to new site-specific commissions by Asian artists Pinaree Sanpitak, Chiharu Shiota, and Kimsooja. Touching on reproduction, isolation, infinity, mortality, and psychological unease, the show offers a memorable experience for the mind and the body.

September 20, 2025 –
January 18, 2026

KERRY JAMES MARSHALL: THE HISTORIES
Royal Academy, London

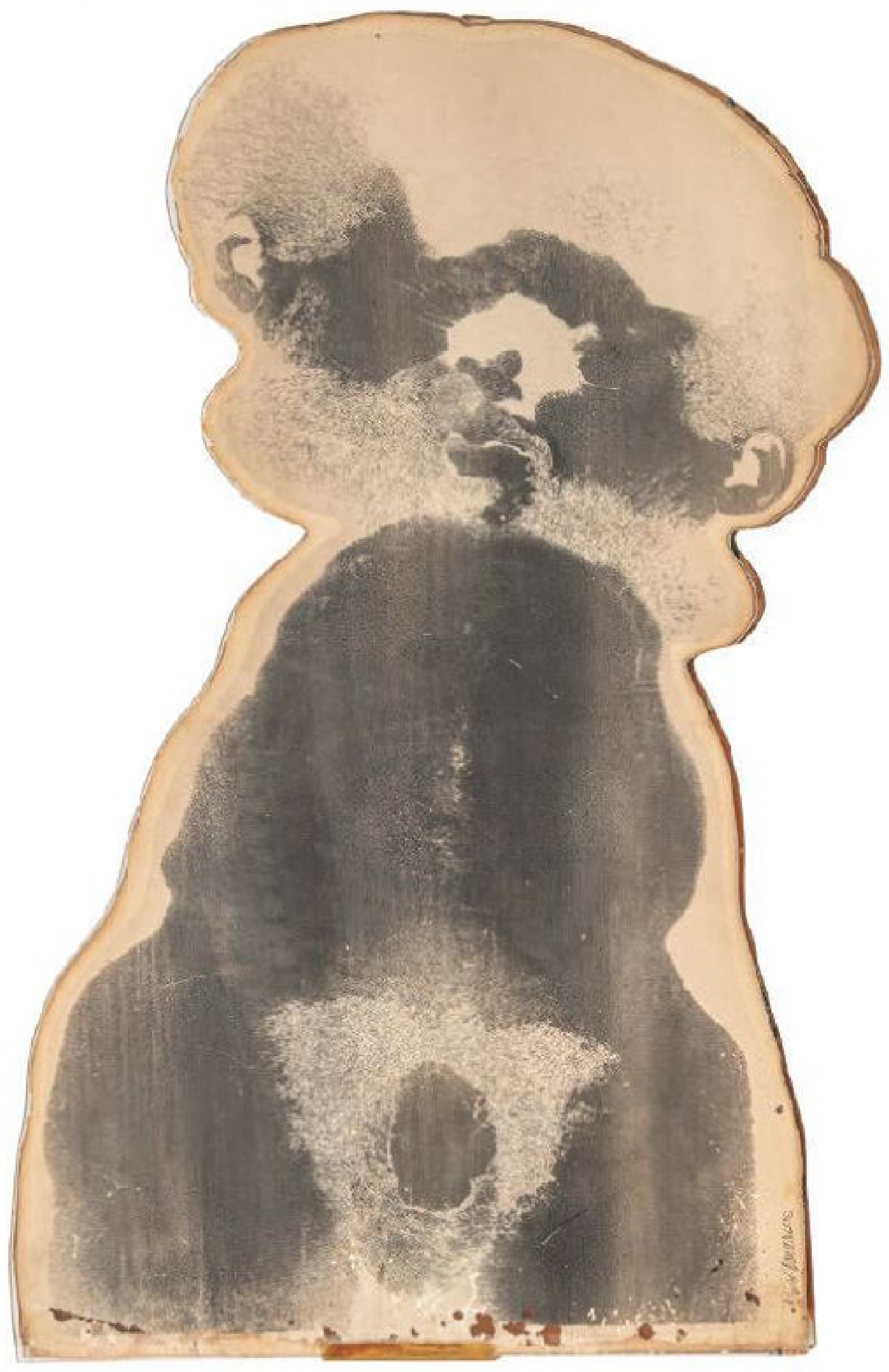


UNTITLED (PORCH DECK), 2014

The groundbreaking American painter Kerry James Marshall is best-known for works that center the Black figure, referencing everything from art history and civil rights to comics, science fiction, and his own personal recollections. Born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1955, Marshall noted from an early age that almost all Western art history was white, and set out to change that, one vast, unstretched canvas at a time. At London's Royal Academy, you can witness Marshall's extraordinary achievements from the 1980s to now in what is the largest European survey of his paintings. Eleven of the artist's series and cycles are on display, conveying scenes of everyday life in Black America—rendered at a scale that lends depictions of picnicking families and dancing lovers all the majesty of a Manet—the history of the Middle Passage, key Black historical figures, and much more besides. A new series exploring episodes in African history and the transatlantic slave trade concludes what is a truly remarkable retrospective.

September 20, 2025 –
January 18, 2026

SIXTIES SURREAL
Whitney Museum, NYC

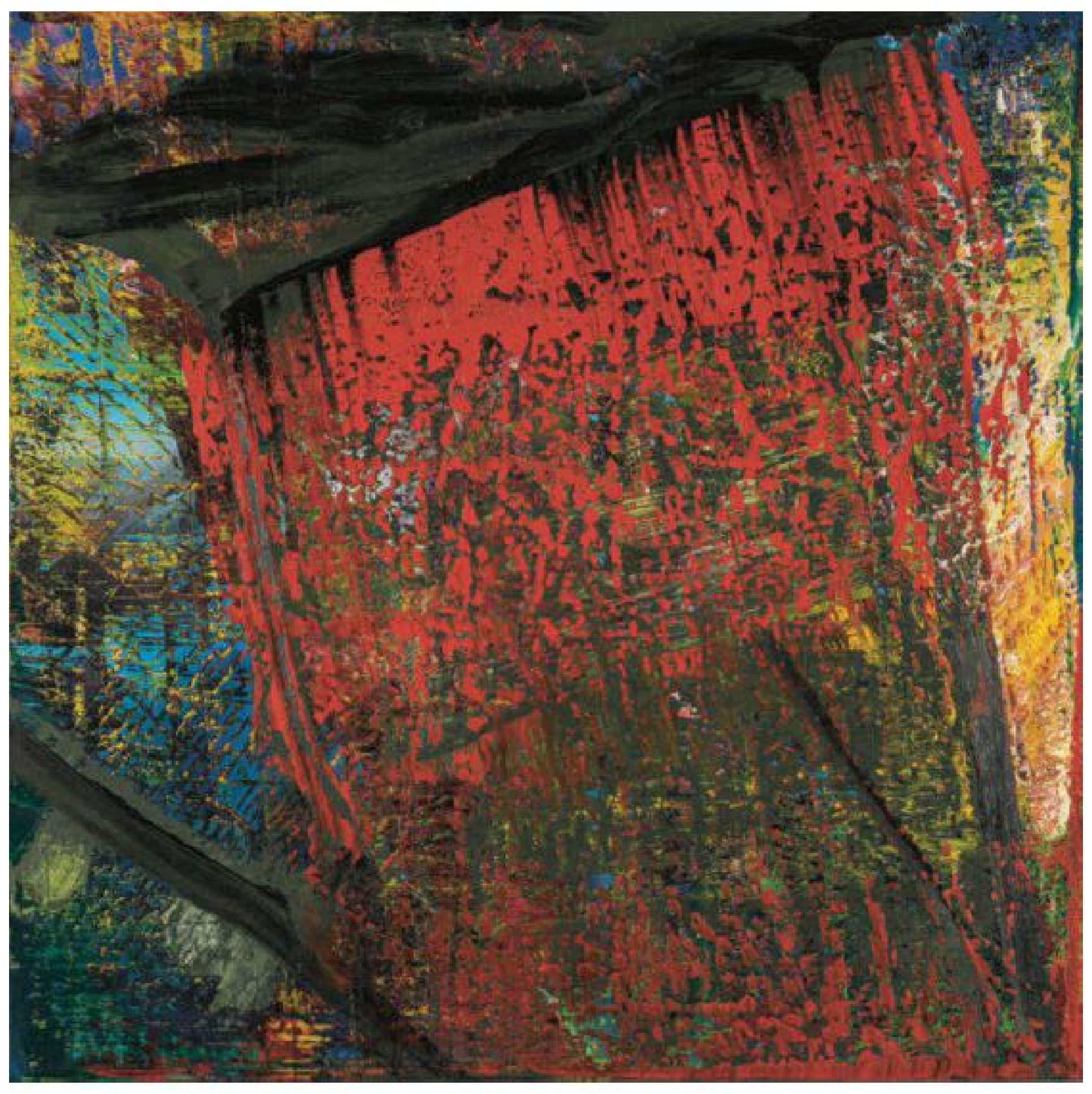


DAVID HAMMONS
Untitled, 1969

The 1960s was a time of cascading social and political change in the USA, giving rise to a radical new surge of artistic energy. *Sixties Surreal*, an extensive new show at the Whitney Museum, looks beyond the canon of 60s art as we know it to focus instead on "the era's most fundamental, if underrecognized, aesthetic current—an efflorescence of psychosexual, fantastical, and revolutionary tendencies, undergirded by the imprint of historical surrealism and its broad dissemination." The show effortlessly oversteps the boundaries that have long blinkered a critical perspective; in this new examination of art from the period, household names—Diane Arbus, Yayoi Kusama, Louise Bourgeois—sit alongside those more recently discovered. The result? A fresh, forward-thinking, and decidedly relevant perspective on one of the 20th century's most examined eras.

September 24, 2025 –
January 19, 2026

GERHARD RICHTER
Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris



GUDRUN, 1987

For more than 60 years, Gerhard Richter has interrogated the nature of painting in his rigorous, wide-reaching work, touching the furthest edges of photorealism and abstraction alongside explorations in photography and even glass sculpture. This fall, a landmark celebration of the Dresden-born artist takes over every gallery at Paris's Fondation Louis Vuitton, sharing more of his masterpieces than have ever been exhibited in one place before. Born in 1932, Richter's early life was dramatically shaped by both the Nazi and the state-socialist regimes in Germany—two influences that play a tangible part in his practice, which traces themes of memory, authorship, and the passing of time, to mention a few. Throughout his career, the artist has pursued an interest in reinterpreting traditional genres, from still life and portraiture to landscape and history painting. But regardless of his subject, his perspective has always remained contemporary—and it's this approach that underpins the Fondation's show. Comprising 270 works, it is unmatched both in scale and chronological scope. A rare and unparalleled opportunity to absorb so much work by a man widely referred to as the world's greatest living painter.

October 17, 2025 –
March 2, 2026

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22—26 OCTOBER 2025
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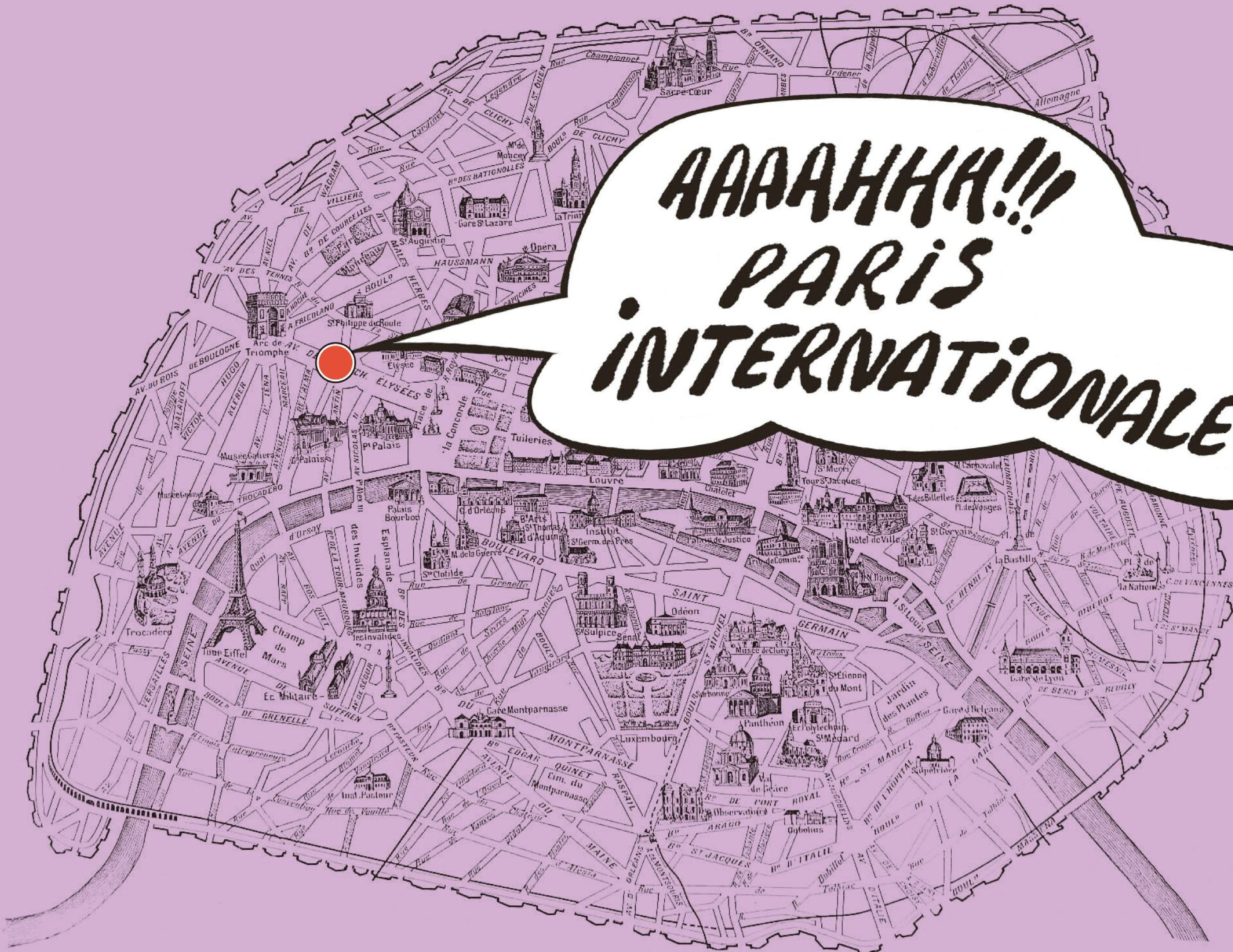
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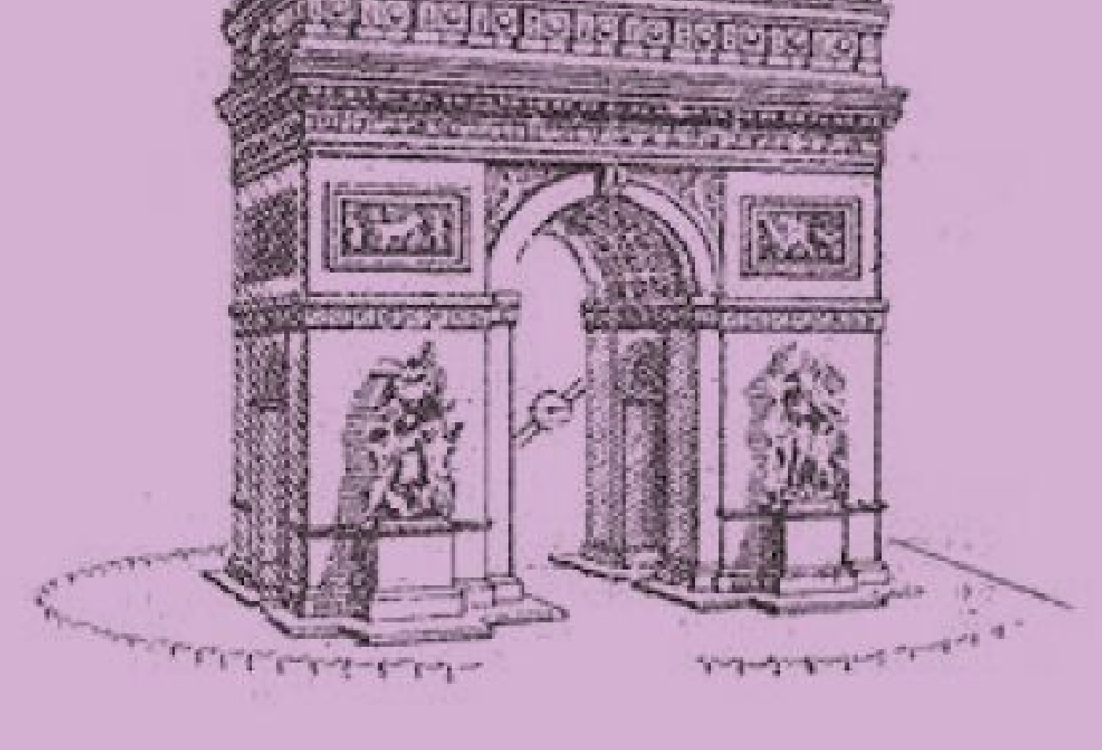
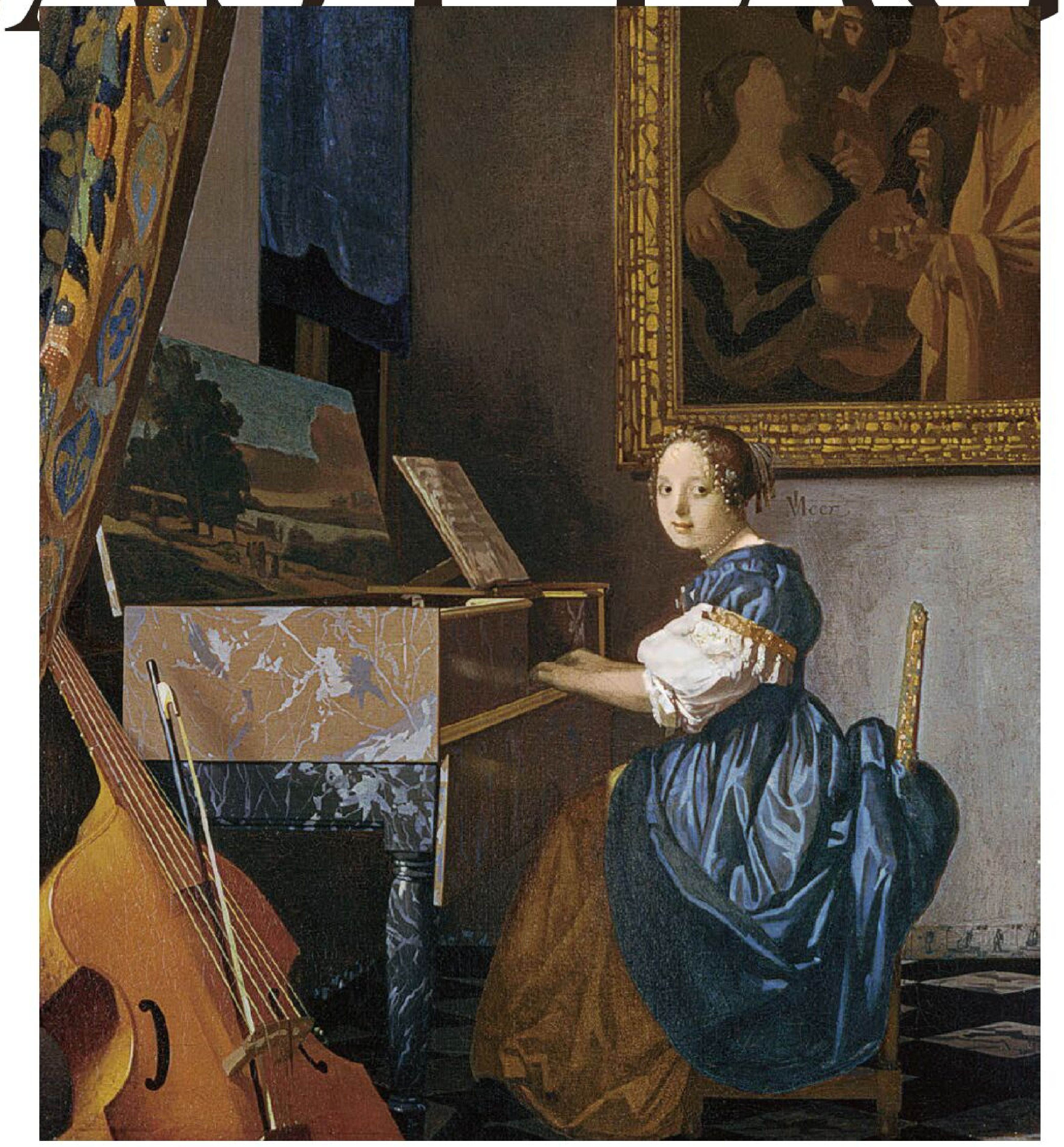


ROND-POINT DES CHAMPS-ELYSÉES, PARIS
PARISINTERNATIONALE.COM

by HANS-JOACHIM MÜLLER

Deep in his dénouement, Vermeer continued to paint women, his final sitter about to strike a chord, but forever frozen in time

LAST PAGE



JOHANNES VERMEER, *A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, c. 1670–72
Oil on canvas, 52 × 46 cm

LAST PAINTING

In a way, Johannes Vermeer was a painter of women: one writes a letter, another reads one; one tunes a lute, another sits at a harpsichord; one makes lace, another sleeps. In each painting, a woman smiling, drinking wine, filling a glass, or showing off a pearl earring. Sure, there were men: a painter, a music teacher, a geographer, an astronomer. Yet the women are more touching, more memorable. They look like they have stored away their deepest selves, their most precious possessions, yet they meet their portraitist's eye as if there was some unspoken pact between them.

The painter never told their secrets, and neither is there much known about him. Born in the Dutch city of Delft in the 17th century, Vermeer worked slowly, producing two paintings a year. There are barely 40 of them—perhaps a few less, perhaps a few more. When it comes to *A Young Woman Seated at a Virginal*, experts largely agree it must have been painted in the last few years of his life. One last musician and her instrument, her voluminous dress cut from pricey silk, the lid of her harpsichord open.

Her pose is a little stiff, strained, not as confident in this role as she was reading a letter, playing guitar, or weighing pearls. Even so, Vermeer's paintings are never less than a precious combination of strategy and magic, accuracy and enigma. You can practically count every heartbeat. In this one, the spell appears a little frozen in time. The woman's hands are poised on the keys, as if only waiting for a sign to play the final chord.

FONDATION LOUIS VUITTON

GERHARD RICHTER

EXHIBITION
17 OCT. 2025 – 2 MARCH 2026

Book on fondationlouisvuitton.fr #FondationLouisVuitton #GerhardRichter
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